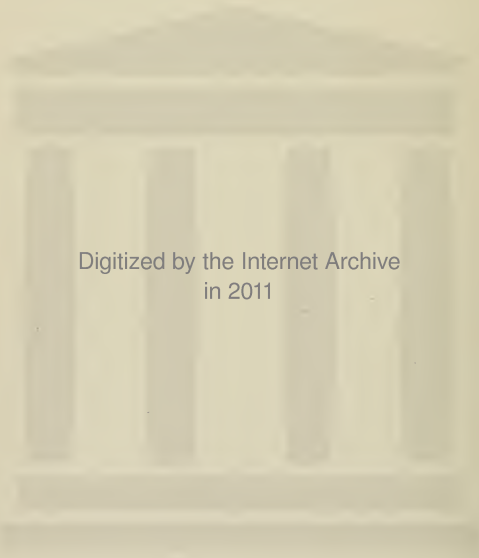


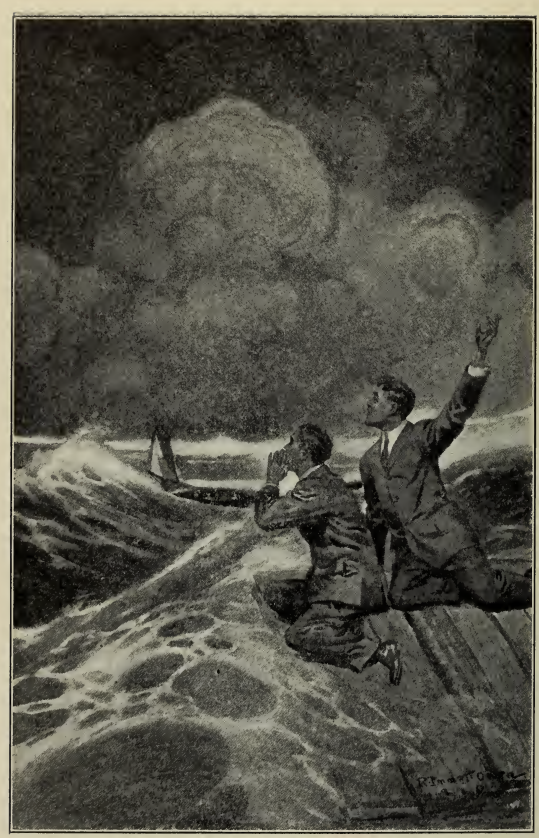
FRANK MERRIWELL'S REWARD

BURT · L STANDISH


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John Marchmont



Both Merry and Hodge forgot their discomfort, forgot their chilled and benumbed condition, and, lifting themselves as high as they could, shouted for assistance. (See page 254)

FRANK MERRIWELL'S REWARD

BY

BURT L. STANDISH

AUTHOR OF

"Frank Merriwell's School Days," "Frank Merriwell's Chums,"
"Frank Merriwell's Foes," etc.



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Frank Merriwell's Reward

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FRANK MERRIWELL'S REWARD.

CHAPTER I.

A RUNAWAY AUTOMOBILE.

"Li, there! Hook out!" shouted Harry Rattleton.

"Hi, there! Look out!" echoed Bart Hodge, getting the words straight which Harry had twisted.

"Get out of the way, fellows!" warned Jack Diamond.

"The juice that it's loaded with must be bug juice!" squealed Danny Griswold. "It's crazy drunk!"

"Tut-tut-tut-turn the cuc-crank the other way!" bellowed Joe Gamp.

"This crank," said Bink Stubbs, giving Gamp a twist that spun him round like a top.

"I've always believed that more than half of these new-fangled inventions are devices of Satan, and now I know it!" grumbled Dismal Jones.

"You'll be more certain of it than ever if you let it run over you!" Frank Merriwell warned, stepping to the sidewalk, and drawing Dismal's lank body quickly back from the street.

"Huah! It's worse than a cranky horse!"

Bruce Browning reached down, took Danny Griswold by the collar, and placed the little fellow behind him.

"Unselfishly trying to save your bacon at the expense of my own!" Browning suavely explained, as Danny began to fume. "Do you want that thing to step on you?"

An electric hansom, which had sailed up the street in an eminently respectable manner, had suddenly and without apparent reason begun to act in an altogether disreputable way. It had veered round, rushed over the crossing, and made a bee-line for the sidewalk, almost running down a party of Frank Merriwell's friends, who were out for an afternoon stroll on the street in the pleasant spring sunshine.

The motorman, who occupied a grand-stand seat in the rear, seemed to have lost control of the automobile. He was excitedly fumbling with his levers, but without being able to bring the carriage to a stop.

The street was crowded with people at the time, and when the electric carriage began to cut its eccentric capers there was a rush for places of safety, while the air was filled with excited cries and exclamations.

Merriwell could see the head of a passenger, a man, through the window of the automobile.

"She's cuc-coming this way again!" shouted Gamp. "Look out, fellows!"

The front tires struck the curbing with such force

that the motorman was pitched from his high seat, landing heavily on his head in the gutter.

Bruce Browning was one of the first to reach him.

"Give him air!" Bruce commanded, lifting the man in his arms and stepping toward a drug-store on the corner.

Some of the crowd streamed after Browning, but by far the greater number remained to watch the antics of the automobile.

The man inside was fumbling at the door and trying to get out. The misguided auto climbed the curbing and tried to butt down the wall of a store building.

"Give it some climbin'-irons!" yelled a newsboy.

The automobile, with its front wheels pressed against the wall, began to rear up like a great black bug, determined apparently to scale the perpendicular side of the building and enter through one of the open windows above. As soon as he saw the motorman pitched into the gutter, Merriwell moved toward the carriage.

"Time to take a hand in this!" was his thought. "There will be more hurt, if I don't!"

He leaped to the step, but before he could mount to the high seat the auto was butting blindly against the wall.

"He's goin' ter shut off the juice!" squeaked the newsboy.

What the trouble had been with the levers Merry did not know. When he took hold of them, the hansom

became manageable and obedient. He shut off the electricity, and the front wheels dropped down from the wall. The next moment he swung to the ground and opened the door.

To his surprise, the man who emerged from the carriage was Dunstan Kirk, the leader of the Yale ball-team.

"Glad to see you!" gasped Kirk. "I couldn't get out, and I was expecting the thing to turn over! I believe I'm not hurt."

"The motorman is, though! He has been carried into the drug-store."

Frank looked toward the drug-store, and saw an ambulance dash up to convey the injured man to the hospital.

"Glad you're all right!" turning again to the base-ball-captain. "These things are cranky at times. I've had some experience with one."

A policeman pushed forward to take possession of the automobile until the company could send another motorman.

The ambulance dashed away, and Browning, Diamond, and Rattleton came across the street hurriedly from the apothecary's. Bink and Danny, Gamp and Dismal—other friends of his—were already crowding round Merriwell. Back of them was a pushing, excited throng.

"Which way did that carriage go?" Kirk demanded.

"Which carriage?"

"The one that was just ahead of us. I was chasing it in the automobile?"

"With a driver in a green livery and a bay horse?" asked the newsboy, who had pushed into the inner circle.

"Yes. Which way did it go?"

"Turned de first corner."

"Let's get a cab!" said Kirk. "Come, I want you to go with me!"

He caught Merriwell by the arm. A cab had drawn up near the curbing, and toward this they moved, Merriwell reserving his questions until later.

Dunstan hurriedly gave instructions to the driver, and climbed in after Merriwell.

"Now, what does this mean?" Frank demanded, as the cab started with a lurch. "What sort of a wild-goose chase are you on?"

"What made that auto-carriage do that way?"

"There was something the matter with it, I suppose."

"It struck me that the motorman may have been in the pay of the fellow I was chasing."

He lowered his voice, even though the rattling of hoofs and wheels and the noises of the street rendered it wholly improbable that the driver or any one else could hear what was spoken inside.

"Frankly, Merriwell, the chap I was chasing looked like Morton Agnew! I was in Mason & Fettig's, five or six blocks above, when some one came into the other room and passed a counterfeit ten-dollar bill on the pro-

prietor. He discovered it while the fellow was going through the door, and gave a call. I ran to the door and saw the rascal—not well, you know, but a side glance —not much more than a flash—and I thought he was Agnew. Of course, I couldn't swear to it. I may have been mistaken. But to satisfy myself, I jumped into that automobile and gave chase. He saw I was pursuing him and he sprang into a cab. I was determined to overhaul the scamp and satisfy myself on that one point. Perhaps I ought not to mention the name, as I am so uncertain, and I shall not mention it to any one else."

Dunstan Kirk, the athletic and capable captain of the baseball-team, had come to admire and trust Frank Merriwell. He had seen enough to know that Frank could be trusted in any way and in any place.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"That there is no chance now of discovering whether your suspicions were true or false. Unless"—hesitatingly —"you should cause Agnew's arrest, and have him taken before the man who was cheated. Or you might tell the man your suspicions, and let him act in the matter."

"I am not certain enough!" said Kirk. "It's too bad he got away! The motorman couldn't have been in his pay?"

"If so, he has received his pay!" said Merry meaningly. "He went out of that seat on his head and struck hard. I think the motorman simply found the hansom unmanageable, for some reason. Those carriages take freaks at times."

"And your opinion about Agnew?"

"He isn't too good to do such a thing, and I have had reason to believe lately that he is hard up. He used to hold himself up by his winnings at cards, but he has cheated so outrageously and boldly that the students fight pretty shy of him."

"We're just wasting our time, I'm afraid!" Kirk grumbled, as the cab rattled on down the street.

"Hold on!" said Merriwell, looking through the window. "There is your green-liveried driver and your bay horse!"

Though the cab in question was standing by a curbing, Frank saw at a glance that the horse was sweaty and showed other signs of recent fast driving.

"Empty, and the bird has flown!" he observed, as the cab they were in stopped and they got out. "Whoever he was—Agnew, or another man—he has had time to escape!"

The green-liveried driver was questioned, but no information of value was obtained, and when it was seen that there was no chance of settling the question which had moved Dunstan Kirk to the pursuit, Kirk settled with the driver of the cab that had brought them thus far, and he and Merriwell went into the nearest restaurant.

"I understand you don't smoke, or I might be tempted to order cigars," he said, as a waiter came forward for their orders, after they had taken seats at a table in one

of the small side rooms. "I wanted to have a talk with you about certain matters. Not about Agnew, but concerning Buck Badger!"

When the waiter had gone he continued:

"I am interested in Badger's pitching. The fellow has good pitching ability. But he is erratic. Sometimes he pitches wonderfully. Then the very next time he will fall away down. I am convinced that what he needs as much as anything else is the right kind of encouragement."

"I consider him one of the very best of the new men who have come up with pitching ambitions," said Merriwell. "I have noticed the things you say."

"You were kind enough some time ago to recommend him to my notice," Kirk went on, as if feeling his way. "You would be glad to help him, perhaps."

"I shall be very glad to help him, if I can, and to serve you in any way, Kirk. But you know he doesn't like me very well. There must be a willingness on both sides, you see—just as it takes two to make a quarrel!"

"I haven't sounded him, but I fancy he would be willing. He isn't doing any good lately. You may have noticed that, too?"

"Yes."

The waiter brought the things ordered, and went away again.

"That *Crested Foam* affair is the cause, I fancy,"

Dunstan Kirk went on, breaking a cracker and helping himself to some cheese.

Frank Merriwell had thought the same, but he did not wish to say so.

"He hasn't acted right since then. And by right, I mean natural, you understand! I suppose it grinds him to know that such a fellow as Barney Lynn could drug and rob him in that way."

Merriwell flashed Dunstan Kirk a quick look. It was evident that the captain of the Yale baseball-team did not know that Buck Badger was intoxicated when he was lured aboard the excursion steamer, *Crested Foam.*

A similar imperfect knowledge of the true condition of affairs at that time had been noticed by Merriwell in the conversation of others. The newspapers in the notices of the burning of the steamer had given attention chiefly to Lynn, merely stating briefly that Badger had been drugged and robbed by the ex-boat-keeper.

"I shouldn't think it would be a pleasant reflection," Frank answered.

"Very humiliating to a man of Badger's character. And it has just taken the heart out of him. Until that time he was one of the most promising of the new pitchers at Yale. I was expecting good things from him. Now he seems to be nothing but a blighted 'has-been!'"

Merriwell smiled.

"And of all the sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"

"Just so," assented Kirk. "It's too bad to see a capable fellow go to the bone pile! I don't like it. I talked with him and tried to encourage him, but it had no permanent effect. He braced up for a little while, and then slumped again."

"At heart, Badger is very proud!" Frank explained. "He wouldn't admit it, perhaps, even to himself. He craves popularity, too, though he affects not to care at all for the opinions of others. It has been his misfortune not to be popular. His disposition is against it. This has made him very sore at times, though he has tried to conceal the fact. Now you can see that to a man of his disposition the things that happened on the *Crested Foam* would be tremendously depressing."

The captain of the ball-team would have seen even more clearly how depressing they were if he had known all that Merriwell knew.

"Somehow, he seems to me like a man who is under the impression that he has lost all of his friends," said Kirk. "He needs to be assured that such is not the case —that his friends and acquaintances have no desire to cut him. I think if that could be done he would come out of the slough of despond and be worth something. We may need him this summer; or a man who has his pitching ability ought to develop into something worth while."

Frank saw that Dunstan Kirk was edging toward some kind of a request.

"If there is anything I can do!" he invited.

"Well, as your picked nine is to play Abernathy's nine, of Hartford, on the ball-grounds here next Saturday, I wondered if you would be willing to let Badger pitch. It is an unheard-of sort of request to make, I know, and it leaves me under the suspicion of wanting to see you beaten by the Hartford fellows. But I hope you know me well enough to understand that such cannot be the case."

"Sure! I'd never thought of it, if you hadn't!"

"I've thought of asking this of you for a day or two. You see, if you, who are not particularly Badger's friend, show such a disposition to recognize and honor his pitching abilities, it ought to brace him up!"

Merriwell drummed thoughtfully on the table.

"Perhaps it can be done! If it will brace him up any and put him on his feet, I shall be glad to show Badger all the consideration I can."

"I was almost afraid to mention it," explained Kirk, "for I know that he has not felt just right toward you. But if you will?"

"I intended to pitch that game myself, for Abernathy's men are not the easiest things on the planet. Of course, if Badger falls down, I should be compelled to go into the box and do my best to save the day. And with a fellow like Badger, that might not work well. It would be just like him to think that I did it to humiliate him and show myself the better pitcher! You see the possibility?"

"Yes, I see it!"

There were other considerations, which Frank did not desire at the moment to mention.

"I'll have a talk with Badger, and see what I can do!" Kirk went on. "When he was so wildly ambitious, a little while back, a word from me might have settled it; but I suppose I shall have to show him by argument that he ought to accept your friendly offer. You authorize me to make that as an offer?"

"Yes. I'm willing to try to help Badger. He has good stuff in him, and, as you say, it would be too bad for him to get into the dumps and neglect to develop it. I can arrange it, I think, and, if he will pitch for us Saturday, he may. With the clear understanding that I am at liberty without question to take the pitcher's box at any time I see fit!"

"Of course!"

The captain's face had brightened. He was not a partisan of Buck Badger, nor of any man. He cared only for the recognition and development of the best Yale players and the triumph of the Yale nine. And because he recognized in Frank Merriwell these same unselfish qualities he had come to him with this request.

"I doubt much if Badger will accept the offer," said Frank.

"I shall take the offer to him, anyway. I believe it will brighten him to receive it, even if he refuses it. That desire for popularity which you mentioned will, I

think, make him accept. He may tell himself and all his friends that he doesn't care for your opinion, but he does, just the same! He can't help caring for the opinion of any man who is a gentleman. I shall approach him carefully!"

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE NEWS WAS RECEIVED.

"Huah!" grunted Browning, opening his eyes a trifle in surprise, "don't that jar you?"

"What will Bart say?" gasped Rattleton.

"Merriwell doesn't have to take his orders from Hodge!" snapped Diamond. "But, just the same, I think it's a fool sort of agreement!"

Merriwell was in his room talking to some of his friends of the request of the baseball-captain.

"Hodge will be cot under the holler!" sputtered Rattleton.

"My dear Rattles, don't worry about Hodge!" Diamond begged.

"If you had only said to that captain, 'Get thee behind me, Satan!'" grumbled Dismal Jones. "But, of course, you could not resist such a temptation! When evil makes itself seem to us good, we're sure to give way. 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall!'"

Merriwell smiled. He liked to get the opinions of his friends, though usually he acted on his own.

"So you think it was a temptation instead of an opportunity?"

"What is a temptation?" chirped Bink Stubbs.

"Why, every time you grin at me that way I want to hit you in the mouth," explained Danny. "It's a temptation I can hardly resist!"

"Crush it!" yelled Bink, feinting with his fists. "If you don't, I'll have to!"

"Somebody throw those idiots out of the window!" growled Bruce, seeking solace in his pipe.

"Somebody give me a light for this cigarette first," begged Danny. "If I must fall I want help to alight!"

"Shouldn't think you'd need it!" Browning declared. "You have a light head. It would hold you up like a balloon!"

"Of course, if the captain wanted you to take on Badger and you've promised to do it, you'll have to go ahead. I'll band sty you—I mean I'll stand by you! I'll do my best to hold down third, no matter who is pitching."

Frank gave Rattleton a grateful look.

"You're always loyal, Harry!"

"Oh, I suppose that all of us will have to accept it, and do the best we can," Diamond admitted, "but I don't like it, and that's flat. None of us has fallen in love with Buck Badger!"

"We'll be bub-bub-bub-beat worse than any old drum!" grunted Gamp.

"Everlastingly thumped!" wailed Danny.

"I don't know that I can get up enough interest to do much good on first," grumbled Bruce, who was as little pleased as any one.

"What's the use of going to the trouble of playing when you know at the start that you're to be defeated?"

"Look here, Bruce!" said Merriwell firmly. "I don't want to hear you talk that way! We are not going to be beaten. We will wallop Abernathy's men, and don't you worry. We can do it all right!"

"Isn't that the crack team of Hartford?" demanded Diamond.

"Yes. Nothing better over there, I think."

"Then there will be no dead-easy business about it. They're not going to lie down and let us walk over them, just for the purpose of stiffening the spine of that Kansan!"

Jack Diamond was disgusted with the outlook.

"Have I said that they are easy?" Merriwell asked. "I only said I felt sure we could defeat them. And we can. Badger is a good pitcher. You know that. And if he loses his nerve, I shall very promptly take his place. There will be no monkeying. You are the fellows that seem to be in the notion of lying down."

"Oh, we'll play!" grunted Bruce. "We're just airing our little opinions. I expected to see you in the box Saturday, and I'm disappointed. I suppose that's all!"

He gave a tug at his pipe and rolled over lazily on the lounge, as if that settled it.

"Of course we'll play," agreed Diamond. "But I don't like to go into the game with Badger in the box. I don't like him. The fellow has made himself an in-

sufferable nuisance. I don't agree with you that he is such a wonder. He's a very ordinary fellow, with a rich father and a swelled head. Out West, where he came from, everybody got down on their knees to him, and here at Yale that sort of business don't go. Nobody cares whether his father is a cattleman or a cow-puncher. He wants to be worshiped, and Yale isn't in the worshiping business. Consequently, he's sore all the time!"

Jack forgot that, when he arrived at Yale a few years ago, he expected homage on account of his family and pedigree.

"And I don't forget that he went aboard the *Crested Foam* blind drunk, and made an ass of himself generally!" said Bruce, rousing again.

"That's one reason Merry wants to give him a show!" said Rattleton. "Badger has an idea that everybody who knows about it feels just as you do, and Frank wants to show him that they don't. See?"

"Oh, we'll play, of course!" Bruce grumbled, rolling back again.

"Sus-sure!" declared Gamp. "Whatever Mum-Merry says, gug-gug-gug-gug——"

"Are you trying to say goshfry?" Danny mildly asked, wetting the end of an unlighted cigarette.

"Gug-goes!" sputtered Gamp, giving Danny a kick that fairly lifted him from the floor. "You mum-mum-mum-measly runt, I'll kuk-kill you!"

"Because he's a joker, Danny thinks he is the only card in the pack!" said Dismal.

"If Merry says we can go into that game next Saturday with Badger in the box and earth the wipe—I mean wipe the earth with those fellows from Hartford, we can do it!" Rattleton declared emphatically. "You know he wouldn't say such a thing if he wasn't sure of it."

"There are only two absolutely sure things, death and taxes," said Merriwell soberly. "If I put too much emphasis on my belief, I'll have to withdraw it. I mean to say that I believe we can."

"And that's about the same as saying that we can!" Rattleton asserted.

"I'm only doubtful about Bart," said Dismal, like a prophet of evil.

"He will never catch for Badger!" Diamond declared.

"I think he will!" sputtered Rattleton. "He will see it just as we do, after Merry talks with him. Of course, we don't any of us love Badger, but what's the difference?"

"Let 'er go!" cried Bink, holding up his hands as if they gripped a bat. "Of course, we'll play ball!"

"Of course!" said Dismal. "We'll pitch Bart out of the camp if he makes a kick. The fellow that balks on that, when he understands it, is 'fit for treason, stratagem, and spoil!'"

Shortly after, Merriwell met Hodge on the campus,

coming from the fence. He saw at once that Bart was "steaming."

"Look here, Merriwell," said Hodge, bristling with indignation. "It surely can't be true that you're going to put Badger into the pitcher's box next Saturday?"

Frank took him by the arm and turned with him away from the crowd.

"Yes," he answered, "I have promised to do that."

Hodge's face grew black with wrath.

"You've made a fool of yourself!" he roughly declared. "I wouldn't believe it. I said it was a lie, and I threatened to thump the face off of Donald Pike because he told it. Say, Merry, you don't really mean it?"

Frank had dropped Bart's arm, but they still walked on together. It was easy to see that he did not like Hodge's tone and manner.

"I must say you are outspoken and far from complimentary," he observed.

"I know I don't talk like this to you often."

"That's right. If you did, I'm afraid we might not be such good friends."

"But I must talk straight now, Merry!"

"I'm willing that you shall drive ahead, but I want you to hold in your temper. Don't let it run away with you."

"Great Scott! how can I hold in my temper under such provocation?"

"Simply by holding it in."

"But you know how I hate Badger? You know that we're bitter enemies! You know what I think of him!"

"I think I've heard you express some sentiments along that line."

"You know that he was drunk when he went aboard that excursion steamer! And he can't pitch!"

"You are wrong there!" Frank declared positively. "He can pitch."

"Why, Merry, those Hartford fellows will just put it all over us. I tell you it won't do! You must give it up!"

"I suppose you know why I promised to let him pitch?"

"Well, I haven't heard, but I can guess. After you'd saved him from drowning himself, and he came to realize what everything meant, he came licking round you, professing gratitude and friendship, and all that sort of stuff. And you——"

"See here, Hodge!" said Frank, with uncommon sternness. "I won't stand talk like that, and you ought to know it. I'm your friend, as I've proved many times, but I can't remain your friend if you treat me that way. I'm ready to hear your opinions, but I won't stand abuse from you or any other man!"

"I told you a good while ago that whenever you and Badger ceased to be enemies you would become friends!"

Bart declared, somewhat softened. "And now it has come true. You are wanting to befriend and help him now, just as I knew you would. And after all the dirt he has done you! Why, he's put dirt all over you a dozen times!"

The memory of it caused Bart to lose his head again.

"Badger is my enemy! A man who is his friend is no friend of mine! That is flat! I don't think I can make it plainer."

"You can't; it's plain enough. Badger is not my friend, but I am not his enemy."

"Don't tell me, Merriwell! You are his friend. You wouldn't ask such a thing, if you weren't. You must know that every one of the fellows will kick. What did you make such a fool promise for?"

Merriwell's face was flushed.

"You are making reckless talk, just because you are badly excited, old man! I am sure you will be sorry as soon as you cool off. If I didn't think so, I'd say some things that would be hot enough to take the skin off your face! Now, listen here! I have promised Dunstan Kirk to let Badger pitch next Saturday in that game against Hartford. Kirk thinks it will brace Badger up a little, and perhaps it will. I am willing to help Badger. He can pitch. We need good pitchers. Besides, I have given Kirk my promise. I mean to keep it."

Up to that moment, angry and unreasonable as he was, Bart had half-believed that Merriwell might yet

back out of his position, and refuse to let Buck go into the box. He saw now how mistaken he had been.

"And you expect me to catch for that scoundrel?" he demanded, shaking with rage. "I tell you, Merriwell, I won't do it! I'll do any reasonable thing you want me to do, but I won't do that! I draw the line there, short and sharp! I won't play in a nine with Buck Badger!"

"Very well, then, we'll have to get along without you!"

"Do you mean it, Merry?" Hodge gasped. "Do you mean that you will choose him before me?"

"Nothing of the kind, and you ought to know it. You would know it, if you were not just blind with anger and prejudice. I am not choosing Badger in preference to any of my friends!"

"Why aren't you?"

"Because I am not. There is no choosing of friends in this. I have said Badger shall pitch in that game. That does not make him my friend, and it ought not to drive any of my friends away. I am manager of the picked nine, and I supposed that my friends who had known me so long would be willing that I should have some privileges."

"But when I declare I won't catch?"

"You have no right to make any such declaration."

"Why haven't I?"

"Simply because, as my friend, you ought to be will-

ing to aid me in this matter. I shall not put it on any other ground."

"I'll do anything for you, Merry, but that. I can't do that!"

"You mean you will not do it!"

"I won't do it!"

"Then I shall get another catcher!"

"Do you mean it?"

"I mean it!"

Hodge seemed stunned for a moment. Then his rage boiled over.

"All right, Merry!" he flashed. "If you want to favor a scoundrel like Badger instead of me, you can do it. But I will not catch in that game. I refuse to play on any nine with Badger! I——"

"I remember to have heard you say those things before!" said Frank, turning short about. "We will not discuss it any further, Bart. You are a free man. You may do as you please. I shall not argue the matter with you. Badger is going to pitch for me Saturday forenoon. Good day!"

Hodge stopped and looked after him, all white and shaky, as Merriwell walked away.

Then the hot blood rushed in a tide into his dark face, and he, too, turned and walked off, filled with smothered exclamations and raging like a volcano.

CHAPTER III.

PIKE'S LITTLE PLAN.

Donald Pike was in a nagging mood. He walked up and down the room a few times, finally stopping in front of his chum, Buck Badger. They had been talking about the Saturday ball-game, and both were in bad humor.

"I don't know what's the matter with you, Badger! I'm disgusted with you!"

The Westerner shifted his feet nervously, but said nothing.

"Perhaps you consider it an honor to receive that invitation from Merriwell? I don't! I am surprised that he sent it."

Badger shifted his feet again, and shrugged his thick shoulders. His face was flushed and his eyes looked troubled.

"I am, too!"

"He had a motive, of course!"

Badger tossed a leg over the arm of his chair, and looked out of the window.

"It has been his boast all along that he would have you in his flock by and by! You have always sworn by all that's good and bad that you would never become a friend of his!"

"I'm not a friend of his!"

Pike laughed sneeringly.

"What do you call it? If I say a word against Frank Merriwell you want to eat me up. It's come to that! You were ready to fight him any minute, at first; now you're ready to lick the polish off his shoes, just like the rest of those fellows."

"Nothing of the kind!" Badger hotly declared.

"Well, you're going to pitch for his picked team Saturday!"

"Kirk asked me to."

"And Merriwell sent him?"

"Yes!"

"And they have become such friends that they're almost chums. The fellows are beginning to say that Dunstan Kirk manages the Yale ball-team, and Frank Merriwell manages Dunstan Kirk. They are about right, I guess!"

"I allow that I'm no nearer being Merriwell's chum than I ever was. We could never be chums. But I'm not going to forget what he did for me on the *Crested Foam*. He saved my life, then, Pike!"

"And proposes to wind you round his fingers and drag you at his heels to make you pay for it!"

"So, when he sent me that invitation, and I talked it over with Kirk, I thought I ought to accept it."

"Don't you know that Hodge will refuse to catch?"

"Don't talk about him!" Badger hissed.

"He has already said that he will not catch for such a scoundrel as you!"

"Did he say that?"

"He says you will lose them the game; that it's an outrage to put you into the box, and he won't be a party to it. He says you can't pitch."

"Can't I? He says that, does he?"

"He says that if Frank Merriwell takes up with you, he will never speak to him again. Anyhow, what good will it do you to pitch for Merriwell? You'll be no nearer getting a show on the regular nine."

Badger shoved his hands deep into his pockets, and showed his broad white teeth unpleasantly. Pike was again walking up and down the room.

"I'd almost be willing to become a member of Merriwell's flock just to spite Bart Hodge. My hands just naturally go up, and I want to fight whenever I see him. That's whatever!"

"Oh, you two will be as chummy as the Siamese twins in less than a month."

"Never! I hate him too badly."

"That's the way you were talking of Merriwell a month ago. You will come round to it!"

"Not on your life! Hodge is a different sort of fellow from Merriwell, I allow."

"And you are going to accept that invitation?"

"I told you, Pike, that I have already accepted it.

I'm not Merriwell's friend, and I despise Bart Hodge; but I'm not ungrateful. Whatever other things we learn out West, we learn to pay back favor for favor. I'd be a dirty coyote if I refused to accept that invitation after what Merriwell did for me. That's the way I look at it. I know that I can pitch ball. You know it, too. I can twirl a ball just as good as Frank Merriwell, or any other fellow in Yale, and you know that, too. I reckon I'm able to ride my bronco alone, without Merriwell's help. I am not asking favors—none whatever! I'm simply returning a favor already given! You can see through that, can't you? If you can't, you're as chuckle-headed as a prairie-dog!"

"I can see that you are becoming Frank Merriwell's friend just as fast as you can!"

"You're riding away off the line, Pike! I shall never be Merry's friend in the sense you think. But you know that he is the clean white article. He is straight goods. I've found that out. I used to think different, just as you do, but I've found out I was mistaken. He is a square man. And when he sent that invitation I knew there was no underhand business about it whatever. That's the reason I accepted it; that and because it would have made me feel meaner than a Digger Indian if I had refused it. I'm going to pitch for him Saturday forenoon, and I'll win that game for him, too. Don't you let that fact escape your memory! I hope Bart Hodge will refuse to catch. I'm afraid I couldn't resist the tempta-

tion to throw the ball square at his head every time, if he was behind the bat. I want him to stay out!"

"Well, you're a fool!" Pike snapped, striding toward the door. "I never thought you'd do a thing like that. You are no more like the old Badger than a calf is like a mountain-lion. You had some fire in you once, but you have become as soft as a ninny. The whole thing simply makes me sick."

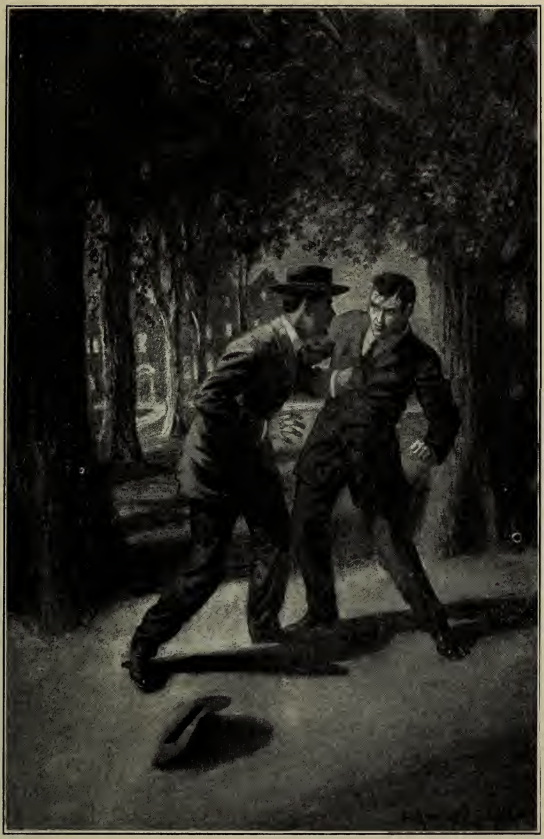
Badger's face was red and his neck veins were swelling.

"I'm not used to any such talk whatever, Pike!" he exclaimed, as Pike hurled these sentences back at him from the doorway. "If you say anything like that again I'll kick you down-stairs! I've taken more off of you to-night than I ever thought I could take from any one, and I won't stand it any longer!"

"Cool off, old man!" Pike sneered. "You're making a chuckle-headed prairie-dog out of yourself, I think. If you should kick me you would kick the best friend you ever had. Good-by. See you later!"

The Westerner did not even grunt a reply, but sat still in his chair with his hands in his pockets, his eyes glittering, his broad teeth showing, his neck veins protuberant and his face as red as a boiled lobster, while Pike walked away.

When Pike came back to the room Badger was gone. Pike entered with his own key. He knew that the Westerner would likely be away a number of hours,



"You lie, Donald Pike! you had some object. I can almost guess what it was."
(See page 37)

calling on Winnie Lee. He glanced round the room, then went to the closet in which Badger's clothing hung.

Pike was crafty in his hate. He did not intend to lose his grip of the Kansan. He realized that he had gone almost too far. Badger would bear a good deal from him because of what they had been to each other, but to this there were limits. He felt that he had nearly reached the limit.

"He shall not pitch ball Saturday, if I can help it!" he hissed, as he looked over the things in the closet. "If I can work it, it will make Hodge so hot against him that there will be a fight. And perhaps it will turn Merriwell and his precious flock against him, too. It's risky, but it is worth all the risk."

He took out a suit of Badger's clothes, and laid it in a chair. Then he went to a desk and selected from it some "make-up" preparations which had been there ever since the production of the sophomore play, "A Mountain Vendetta." Then, after locking the door, he arrayed himself in Badger's suit, and, standing before the mirror, applied the preparations to his face, forehead, and eyebrows.

Pike had a good deal of artistic skill in such matters, and in a short time he had darkened his face, blackened his brows and drawn certain lines and colors, that, together with the change produced by the clothing, made

him resemble Badger in a remarkable manner. When he put on Badger's hat the alteration seemed complete.

"Of course, that wouldn't stand close inspection," he muttered. "But there will be no close inspection. I shall look out for that. Now for the voice!"

He bunched up his shoulders to give them a thick look, cleared his throat, and looking straight at himself in the glass, began to imitate Badger's tones and characteristics of speech, speaking so low, however, that there was no danger of being heard by any one who might chance to pass.

"I allow that I'm a Kansan from away beyond the Kaw, and I reckon I'm a diamond pure without the slightest flaw! Sure! A genuine prairie-dog from the short-grass country couldn't chatter more like a Westerner than that. That would fool Badger himself. That's whatever! Yes, I reckon. My daddy is a rancher, and I allow that I am great; for my home is on the boundless plains of the wonderful Sunflower State! If I should practise, I reckon I could become a poet!"

Satisfied with his make-up and his abilities to imitate Badger's tone and language, Donald Pike returned the unused articles to the drawer, put away the clothing he had removed, and then sneaked down into the campus, carrying under his coat a long, stout cord. Keeping away from the electric lamps and other lights he slipped stealthily on until he reached the entrance which led to the rooms occupied by Merriwell and Hodge.

Diamond and Browning came down, talking in low tones of Merry and Bart, and from this talk, Pike, who had withdrawn into the shadows, learned that both Hodge and Frank were out in town somewhere. This suited Pike's plans, and when Diamond and Bruce disappeared, he crawled into the shadow of a column and watched the path along which Hodge and Merriwell would come on their return.

"They'll not come back together, sure, unless all the stories I've heard are lies; for they're not on speaking terms!" he reflected. "The only thing I fear is that Hodge may not care to come to his rooms at all."

The thought made him uneasy, and caused the vigil which followed to appear torturingly long.

"Ah! there he is!" he whispered, at last.

Slipping across the path, he tied an end of the cord he had brought to a post, then retreated into the shadow and tied the other end about the column. The youth he had seen came on at a brisk walk. Pike was sure it was Hodge. He almost ceased to breathe as the unsuspecting young fellow approached the cord. He put himself in position for a hasty spring.

Crash!

The youth tripped over the string, and went down headlong, falling heavily.

"I reckon I've got you now!" Pike hissed in a low tone, imitating Badger's voice, and at the same time leaping toward the prostrate form. Deceived by the dark-

ness, Donald Pike had tripped Frank Merriwell, but he did not yet know it. With that imitation of the Westerner's speech, he knocked Merriwell down, as the latter tried to get up.

Again he struck, as Frank attempted to rise, but Merriwell dodged the blow, and, catching Pike by the legs, threw him. Before Pike could realize what had happened, Merriwell was on top, with his fingers at Pike's throat.

"You scoundrel!" Frank hissed. "I am tempted to give you what you deserve for that!"

But Pike was not ready to surrender, though he knew now that he had committed a woful blunder. In fact, the knowledge that he was dealing with Frank Merriwell aroused him to a fierce resistance. He felt that it would simply be ruinous to be held and recognized by Merriwell, and he began to fight like a demon to get away.

He freed his hands, and struck Frank heavily in the face, at the same time kicking with all his might. He tried to thrust his thumbs into Frank's eyes.

"I'll kill you, if you don't let me go!" he snarled.

Frank had felt from the first that his assailant could not be Buck Badger; now he recognized the voice of Donald Pike, for Pike, in his fright and desperation, forgot to keep up the disguise.

Seeing that the only way to deal with Pike was to choke him into semi-insensibility, he caught and crushed down the flailing fists and arms and tightened his grip

on Pike's throat. Pike writhed and flounced, kicking and struggling, but all without avail. That viselike grip grew tighter and tighter. The pain seemed unbearable. He gurgled and choked, and his lungs seemed to be bursting. He could not breathe, and his brain began to reel.

"Give in?" Frank asked.

"Don't k-k-k-ill me!" Pike gasped, as the grip on his throat relaxed.

"You deserve it, you scoundrel!"

Frank took his knee from Pike's breast, removed the choking hand, and flung Pike from him.

"Now get up!" he commanded. "Get up before I am tempted to kick you across the campus!"

Pike shuffled and evaded, as his breath came back.

"I thought you were Badger, and I was just playing a little joke on you!" he whined.

"Get up!" Frank exclaimed.

Pike struggled up, and Merriwell jerked him toward the nearest light. He saw the "make-up," and recognized the clothes as some he had seen on the Kansan.

"What were you up to?" he demanded, with threatening emphasis. He saw forms moving in the campus, and he did not want to tarry with Pike.

"Just a little sport!" Pike whined. He was completely crushed.

"You lie, Donald Pike! You had some object. I can almost guess what it was. You imitated Badger's voice

and way of speaking, when you jumped on me. You are wearing Badger's clothing. That make-up is intended to lead any one who sees you into thinking you were Buck Badger. You wanted to make me believe that Badger had assaulted me."

"Just a joke!" Pike pleaded. "Merriwell, I didn't mean anything, only to have a bit of sport. That is honest. I didn't know it was you."

"Ah! That last sounds as if you meant it. I hardly think you did know who you were tackling. I think I shall take you over to Badger's room, and let him see you just as you are. Come along!"

Pike was not anxious to be seen by the men who were crossing the campus, so he moved along, with Frank at his side.

Frank was thinking rapidly, in an effort to understand Pike's motives.

"I want to know why you leaped on me in that cowardly way, and struck me when I was down. You wouldn't have served Badger that way! And if you wanted to have a little fun with Badger, you would not have disguised yourself and imitated his way of speaking. That story don't go with me, Pike!"

Pike was watching for a chance to escape, intending to make a dash for liberty at the first opportunity.

"You are disguised as Badger. Badger would not assault me that way, for Badger is a man! But you wanted

to make some one think he had been assaulted by Badger. That one must be Bart Hodge!"

Pike started to run, but Frank caught him by the collar, and jerked him back.

"Don't be in a hurry, Pike! I've seen you through and through for some time, and understand your little game of this evening."

Donald Pike walked on for a time peaceably enough, but he was only watching for an opportunity to break away. Again he fancied the opportunity had come. But no sooner did he start than Frank tripped him, and he fell sprawling. Before he could get up, Frank's hand was on his collar.

He made another fierce struggle as soon as he was on his feet, only to discover that he was as helpless as a child in the hands of Frank Merriwell. He had never dreamed that Merriwell was possessed of such strength and skill.

The shadows were heavier at this point, and Merriwell kept a grip on Pike's collar.

"See here, Pike!" he exclaimed. "If you try anything of that kind again I shall simply knock you down. You are going with me, if I have to tie and drag you. So you might as well come along quietly and save trouble."

"I shall have you arrested for this!" Pike blustered, now that whining and begging and fighting had failed.

"Do! I think your friends would enjoy hearing the story of your remarkable masquerade told in court. Go

ahead with the proceedings, Donald. Just now you are going with me, regardless of the after consequences."

Pike caught at a post, but Merriwell jerked him away from it, and then hurried him rapidly on in the direction of Badger's room. Pike was sure Badger was not in, and began to think that he might save himself bruises and rough treatment by apparent acquiescence.

"I will go with you," he finally panted, "but under protest. And I shall make you sorry for this outrage. You have no right to treat me thus."

Merriwell did not answer, but kept a hand on Pike's collar while he conducted him up the stairs. To Pike's consternation, Buck Badger was in the room and the door was open.

Before Pike could quite make up his mind to try again to escape, Merriwell had bundled him through the doorway.

Badger scrambled up.

"There is your friend!" said Merriwell, pointing a finger accusingly at Pike, who was too confused and humiliated to speak. "He disguised himself that way, and attacked me awhile ago near my room, thinking I was Bart Hodge. He has found out his mistake. He wanted to make Hodge think that you had done the dirty work, so that you and Hodge would lock horns the first time you met, and there would be trouble again all around the camp. He is a contemptible and cowardly puppy, and I feel that I have soiled my hands by touch-

ing him. But I wanted you to see him in that rig, and know him as he is."

A fierce denial was on the lips of Donald Pike, but he had not the courage to utter it. He saw that something more than denials would be necessary to explain matters. The Westerner was as speechless as Pike, and Merriwell turned away.

"I reckon we'll have a little explanation of this, Pike!" were the words Merry heard as he reached the head of the stairs. They were spoken in an awesome tone of voice, and came from Badger's lips.

Then the door closed with a bang, and he knew that the Kansan had barred the way of Pike's escape from the room. The next morning Frank received this note:

"MR. FRANK MERRIWELL: Pike and I had a settlement last night. He tried to lie out of the thing, but I made him confess to the whole truth. Then I kicked him down-stairs. We are not rooming together any more whatever. BUCK BADGER."

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE HOME OF WINNIE LEE.

Frank Merriwell seemed the personification of spring as he approached the residence of Fairfax Lee, the next afternoon. Spring is the time when the wine of life flows warm through the veins of Nature. Its face holds the bloom of youth and the smile of hope. Its heart is all aglow with the joy of living. The golden summer is before it; and it has no dead past, for the winter seems to belong to the year that has gone.

A handsomer specimen of young manhood could not have been found. The flowering spray in his buttonhole seemed part of the jaunty new suit which so became him. He was clean-looking and energetically wholesome. From the crown of his head to the soles of his feet he was nattily neat, yet he was as far from being dudish in appearance as it is possible for one to be. He looked to be what he was—strong, and lithe-limbed, almost physically perfect, with a handsome, intelligent face, hopeful, courageous heart, and active brain.

Yet many things had come to trouble him in the past twenty-four hours, even though his bright face showed not a trace of their annoying effect. Chief of these things, of course, was the defection of Bart Hodge.

Hodge had gone away stubbornly angry, and Merriwell had not seen him since the moment of parting.

Every member of the "flock" was hot against Hodge, and had not hesitated to speak plainly. Hodge's rebellious spirit had rallied them round Merriwell as one man. Browning and Diamond had even argued that he ought not to be longer recognized as a member of Merriwell's set. The only one who had ventured to stand up for him, aside from Merriwell himself, was Harry Rattleton. Frank had defended him to the last, insisting that allowances should be made for the peculiarities of Bart's disposition, and asserting that he would be found all right in the end.

Frank was thinking of all this as he drew near the home of Winnie Lee. His intention was to call on Inza and have a talk with her about the 'Varsity boat-races at New London in June, for Inza was the "mascot" of the Yale crew that was to meet Harvard at New London. In addition, he expected to inform her and her friends of the arrangements made for the ball-game with Hartford on Saturday.

He looked about him after he had tripped lightly up the steps and rang the bell. The Lee home was in a fashionable and exclusive part of New Haven, and the spacious grounds were beginning to take on beauty and color under the reviving influences of spring. A fountain, shot through with rainbow hues, was spraying a

marble sprite, while a rheumatic gardener troweled round the rim of a loamy flower-bed.

Winnie, who had observed Merriwell's approach, came to the door herself to admit him.

"Oh, you didn't come to see me?" she asked, when he inquired for Inza.

"That would be pleasant enough, but it wouldn't do to make Buck jealous!"

He laughed in his cheery way.

"I don't think it would be easy to make him jealous of you now," she answered. "And I'm so glad he is to pitch for you Saturday! I want to thank you for that, myself. It was just like you to send such an invitation."

Merriwell's eyes dropped under her earnest look. He dared not tell her just then that the invitation had been procured by Dunstan Kirk.

"Who told you he is to pitch Saturday?"

"Why, he told me so this morning himself."

"And, of course, you have told Elsie and Inza?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want to see Inza, and have a talk with her about the New London races. So I think I will take a car for Mrs. Moran's."

Winnie had informed him that both Inza and Elsie had gone on an errand of mercy to the home of the grandmother of Barney Lynn.

"And you won't come in, even a little while? You prefer their society to mine, I see! I am ashamed of

you, Frank Merriwell! You are not as gallant as you used to be."

Her voice was merry and her heart light.

"Some other afternoon or evening I shall be glad to come in and talk you to death. Just now I am pressed for time."

"I ought to have gone down there with them," she confessed. "But it seemed that I couldn't get away. Frank, you don't know what angels of mercy those girls have been! Elsie found out that Mrs. Moran was starving and dying by inches for lack of proper food and medicines, and since then she and Inza have been down there every day, and often two or three times a day."

"I trust they don't venture after nightfall!"

Frank was thinking of a fight Jack Ready had while rescuing Elsie from the drunken ruffian, Jim Haskins.

Then he thanked Winnie for her invitation, said good-by, and hurried away to catch the first car going in the direction which he wished to take.

"I hope Badger is entirely worthy of her," he thought, his mind on Winnie Lee. "She is a fine girl, and if he gets her he will get a prize. Now, if they don't pass me, coming back in another car! Winnie hasn't the least idea that Buck was intoxicated when he went aboard the *Crested Foam,* and she shall never know it from me!"

Neither of the girls heard Merriwell's gentle rap on Mrs. Moran's door, and he pushed into the house with-

out further ceremony, feeling sure that they were busy in caring for the old lady or that her condition was such that they could not leave her. Then, looking through the doorway at the right of the corridor, his gaze fell on a pleasant sight.

The girls were seated by the bed, Elsie holding one of Mrs. Moran's wasted hands in her own warm palms, while Inza was reading to the old woman from a little copy of the New Testament.

Merriwell stopped for a moment, for his entrance had been unnoticed. Somehow, the pathos of the scene inexpressibly touched him.

"They are angels of mercy, just as Winnie said!" was his thought.

Inza had an excellent reading voice, as pure and liquid as falling water. It was a pleasure to listen to it. Frank had often heard her read, but it seemed to him never with such expression as at that moment. The sunlight, falling through the small west window, illuminated her face, making it almost radiant, and touched with brighter tints Elsie's crown of golden hair.

"I wish I were a painter!" he thought. "I should like to preserve that scene. If I could have that to hang in my room, it would be like a flash of sunshine to look at. But no painter could do it justice. There are certain things that can't be painted, and this is one of them."

He noisily shifted his feet to call attention to his pres-

ence, and Inza looked up. The color flooded her cheeks, and her dark eyes showed surprise.

"Why, Frank!" she gasped. "How did you come to be here?"

Elsie also started up.

"How did you get in?" she asked.

"Opened the door and walked in. You were so busy you didn't hear my knock, so I just took the liberty."

Mrs. Moran stirred, and turning feebly, looked at him, her eyes showing recognition.

"I am very glad to see you!" she whispered, as he advanced toward the bed, and she stretched out one of the feeble hands. "Sometimes I think that I am not long for this world. I should have died here, I feel sure, if it had not been for these girls. And your other friend, Miss Winnie, has been very good, too! I hope you are quite well, Mr. Merriwell!"

"Quite well! Don't let me disturb you. Inza was reading to you. Let her go on. I will sit here in this chair."

So Inza read again, until the old woman was tired; after which the trio left the house, and walked down to the car line, where they took a car for the residence of the Honorable Fairfax Lee.

"I went to Lee's to see you," Frank explained, "for I wanted to talk over some details of the trip to New London and the June races. The mascot of the crew hasn't

been down to the boat-house this week. And I wanted to invite both of you, and Winnie, to the ball-game Saturday forenoon."

"I am sorry about Bart!" Inza exclaimed. "But he will come round all right, don't you think?"

"He may not play in this game, but he will see how foolish he is, and be heartily ashamed of it by and by."

"Who is to catch for you, then?"

"Jack Ready!"

"What?"

"Perhaps you haven't seen Ready catch? He is a good one!"

"You need a strong battery, Frank!" Elsie asserted.

"Yes, like you and Hodge," nodded Inza. "I'm afraid Badger and Ready will not be able to work well together. They haven't played together before, I believe?"

Inza was full of bright, snappy conversation, as they sped homeward in the car with Merriwell. But Elsie was unusually silent.

"She can't get Mrs. Moran out of her mind," Frank thought.

He left them at the door, for the hour had grown so late that he felt he could not just then spare the time to go into the house, much as he wanted to do so. Inza and Elsie went up-stairs together. Winnie was out or in another part of the house.

Inza shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"What is the matter, Elsie, dear?"

Elsie's lips were quivering as she faced round and confronted her friend.

"You ought to know what is the matter, Inza Burrage!" she declared.

"I'm not the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter," said Inza, a bit defiantly. "How should I know?"

"You do know!"

"I should say that you are showing a bit of jealousy, if pressed for an answer."

"And haven't I a right to be jealous, Inza?" Elsie demanded.

"Haven't I a right to talk to Frank Merriwell and be nice to him, if I want to?"

"Of course, Inza, but—well—you know——"

"It seems to me, Elsie, that you came between Frank and me once! Isn't it so? Frank cared for me before he ever did for you. You came between us. I haven't come between you and Frank yet, but if I should do so would it be any worse than what you did?"

"Oh, I thought that was past!" cried Elsie, flushing and trembling. "You never understood me, Inza!"

"And do you fancy for a moment that you understand me?"

"Perhaps not; but I can see—I'm not blind!"

"Oh, yes, jealous people can see things that no one else can," laughed Inza, with a provoking toss of her proud head.

"Do you want to make me hate you forever, Inza

Burrage?" Elsie cried. "You hurt me! You are heartless!"

A sudden look of deep pain shone in Inza's face, changing her manner in a twinkling, and she turned away as if trying to conceal it.

"Of course, nothing ever hurts me!" she said bitterly. "I am steel and iron, and all that! Your heart is tender, and such things hurt you!"

Elsie did not know what to say. She had tried to feel for a time that Inza had ceased to care for Frank, and then had told herself that Inza had no longer any right to care for him. She was beginning to realize that questions of right and wrong cut very little figure in affairs of the heart—that, in fact, love obeys no such laws.

When Inza turned back, her face had lost its trace of pain.

"Elsie," she said, "we will not quarrel about Frank, for Frank's sake. It would distress him if he knew it. He must never know it. Promise me that you will not say a word to him about it."

"Of course I won't say anything about it," Elsie agreed. "I should fear to, and I shouldn't want to."

"Then we'll keep it to ourselves. You have discovered that I haven't ceased to care for Frank Merriwell. Perhaps I never shall. But that is neither here nor there."

The old wave of jealousy swept across the tortured soul of Elsie Bellwood.

"Do you mean that you intend to win him if you can,

after you have told me that you surrender all claim on him?"

"I haven't said anything of the kind. But I claim the right and privilege of talking to him and with him as much as I please. You and he are not engaged, even if he has seemed to prefer you. He may change his mind, just as he did before, but remember that I'm not trying to get him to!"

"Then you do intend to try to win him?"

"My dear, you must recognize the fact that Frank is the one to do the winning. I shall never run after any man."

Elsie's blue eyes flashed.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I would?"

"I thought we weren't going to quarrel!"

The look of pain came back into the dark, handsome face, and this time Elsie saw it. A feeling of remorse began to tug at her heart.

"I am not worthy of Frank Merriwell," she said softly. "I know that. But I thought——"

"You thought nothing could hurt me!"

"No, not that. I thought he was to be mine, and recently that hope has been slipping through my fingers. I can't tell you, Inza, how I have felt."

"I can understand!" said the dark-haired girl. "I have good cause to understand!"

"I know that really you are more worthy of him, Inza, than I am. I have always thought that, when I

wasn't crazy with the fear that you might win him away from me. But I just can't surrender my claim, slender as you think it!"

"For Frank's sake," repeated Inza, "we will not quarrel about him! As for these other questions——"

Winnie's light step was heard in the hall, and the sentence died unfinished.

CHAPTER V.

HODGE'S REPENTANCE.

Bart Hodge absented himself from class and lecture, but later that night, after all the members of the "flock" had departed from Merriwell's room, Bart came in. His face was flushed and feverish.

"I don't care what the other fellows think, Merry!" he said, dropping into a chair as if he felt that he had no right there. "But I do care what you think! I went away in a huff, saying to myself that I'd never come back until you sent for me, when I knew that you wouldn't send for me, and that I would come back. And here I am."

"How could I have sent for you, Bart?" Merry questioned. "I knew you would feel differently when you had time to think it all over, and I told the fellows so."

"I don't care for their opinions!" Bart snarled. "I'd never come back for any of them!"

"They are my friends!"

"I've been miserable ever since. I have felt like a cur as I've sneaked round town. You needn't try to stop me! You are the truest friend I ever had, and I've treated you like a dog. I know it, and I'm sorry for it."

"I am your friend, Bart, because I understand you,

and appreciate you. The others would think as much of you as I do, if they understood you as well. We'll not talk any more about this matter, if you're willing, but just turn in for the night and say nothing about it."

"How can you overlook a thing like that?" Hodge asked.

"Because I knew all the time that your better nature condemned what you did, and that you would by and by yield to your better nature. The man who meets a powerful temptation and finally masters it is stronger really than one who never is tempted. I forgave you long ago, Bart, and would have told you so if you had come back. I was angry at the time, but I didn't remain angry."

"I've come back to tell you that I'll catch for you to-morrow—Saturday. I swore I'd never catch for Buck Badger, but I will. I'll catch for the Old Boy himself, if you want me to. I'm not ready to agree that he ought to be permitted to pitch, for I hate the very sight of him; but I have put that by, and will catch for you. It will be catching for you, you see, Merry, and not for him. I ought to have looked at it that way before, but I could not."

"I have got Jack Ready for catcher!"

Bart gasped, while his dark face seemed to get redder and hotter.

"Why, he can't catch!"

"Much better than you think. He is a pretty fair catcher."

"And if he falls down?"

"I'll put some one else in. I have two or three in mind, and have spoken to two of them."

Hodge seemed stunned.

"I'm willing to catch!" he said.

"You may, Bart, if I see that Ready can't do the work. If the game seems about to be lost I'll go into the pitcher's box and you behind the bat, and we'll pull the nine out of the hole! Eh?"

Hodge's eyes brightened strangely.

"We can do it, Merry! I'll be as steady as a clock. Only I'm sorry things went the way they did and that I showed how mean I can be. I only proved what my enemies say of me. It's too late now, but I'm ready to do what I can to make it right."

Merriwell came over and put a hand on Bart's shoulder.

"I understand you, Bart, and few do. I know that your friendship for me is true blue, and that your heart is where it should be, even if your head runs away with you. Now we'll get to bed. To-morrow we play ball, and I want to be in condition."

But Bart Hodge was not in condition to play ball, nor in condition for anything the next day. When morning came he had a high fever, and the doctor whom Merriwell summoned looked grave.

"He has lost sleep and been exposing himself and caught cold," he said. "It looks like a case of pneumonia. Better send him to the hospital."

"Will he be better off at the hospital than here, if there is some one here to take care of him?"

"No, I don't know that he will. And I was going to say that it is really too bad to move him in his condition."

"Then he will stay right here. I'll get the best nurse to be had, and look after him all I can myself!"

And Hodge, under the best of care, remained in his room, while Merriwell's nine, with Jack Ready as catcher and Badger as pitcher, went out to meet the team from Hartford that forenoon.

A big crowd of rooters had come over from Hartford to whoop things up for Abernathy's men. They were enthusiastic fellows, and they made a great deal of noise. Some of them were betting men, and they flourished their money with as much confidence as if the game were already won and they were certain of raking in their winnings.

But Yale had turned out a big crowd, too, for Merriwell was immensely popular, and, of course, the Yale and New Haven crowd would naturally be the larger on the home grounds.

"We'll have a warm time this forenoon!" Frank observed to Jack Ready.

"Torrid as the equator!" Ready answered.

"How is your nerve, old man?"

Ready dropped a finger to his pulse and seemed to be counting.

"Steady as a clock, Merry!"

"Keep it that way. There is Badger coming over for a talk with you. We'll begin as soon as we get a little warming up."

He looked at his watch and began to talk with Browning, while Ready and Badger drew aside to confer. Merriwell could see that Badger was a bit nervous when the game was called. There was a flush in his face and a glitter in his eyes that told of excitement, but this seemed to disappear as he took the clean new Spalding ball in his hands and entered the box.

In the grand stand Frank saw Inza, Elsie, and Winnie, and he lifted his hat to them again, though he had enjoyed a long talk with them not many minutes before. Winnie was smilingly happy. She waved her handkerchief to Badger, and the Kansan's white teeth showed in a grim smile of determination.

"If only you and Bodge were the hattery—I mean if only you and Hodge were the battery!" Rattleton groaned in Frank's ear.

"Don't worry, Rattles! Just do your duty on third!" Merry answered. "We are all right!"

Thus encouraged, Harry went away happy and confident. Browning was on first, with Diamond on second.

Danny Griswold was short-stop; while Dismal had the right field, Bink Stubbs center, and Joe Gamp the left. The game opened with Merriwell's men in the field.

The Westerner surveyed the ground and his surroundings carefully. Then planted his toe on the rubber plate and shot in a "twister." It curved inward as it neared the batter, and cut the heart of the plate. The batter had been fooled and did not swing at it.

"One strike!" called the umpire.

The batter, who was looking out for an out curve next, swung at it, and fanned the air. The Yale men, and especially the sophomores, began to shout.

Badger thought it time to change to an out curve, and sent one in hot as a Mauser bullet. But the batter was looking for out curves. He reached for it. Crack!—away it sailed into the right field.

"Go, long legs!" was screamed at Dismal Jones, who sprinted for it with all his might.

The next man of the Hartfords at the bat was the pitcher, Pink Wilson, a fellow almost as tall and lank as Dismal Jones, with a hatchet face and a corkscrew nose. His admirers said he got that twisted nose from watching his own curves in delivering. He came up confident, thinking he understood the tricks of the Kansan pretty well, and that he would be easy. But almost before he knew it the umpire called "one strike."

"That ball must have passed this side of the plate,"

he declared. "It was an in, and I had to jump to get out of the way."

"Don't jump at shadows!" shouted a Yale sophomore. "That ball was all right."

The umpire promptly informed Wilson that he was talking too much with his mouth.

"I'll get him the next time!" thought the lank pitcher of the Hartfords. "He fooled me that time, but he can't do it again!"

But Badger did it again. Again the sophomores began to yell. Jack Ready tossed the ball back.

Badger began to look and to feel confident, a thing that Merriwell, who was closely watching him, did not like. This time the Westerner, after almost bending himself double, gave his arm an eccentric movement and shot in another curve. Wilson struck at it desperately, and fanned out.

"He can't keep it up!" yelled a Hartford man, who had been wildly hunting for bets a short time before, and who felt the need of whistling to keep his courage up.

Barrows, the center-fielder, came to the bat next. He went after the very first one, and got it. Crack! and away the ball flew again into the right field, while the Hartford lads opened up with great vigor.

It was a hit, for everybody saw that Dismal, even though he was doing his best, could not possibly get it.

Barrows raced to first, while Tillinghast, the base-runner, took second, without trouble, but stumbled and fell, so that it was impossible for him to make another bag on the hit.

Badger next tried his highest speed, and the batter fanned, but Ready dropped and fumbled the ball, being unable to hold it, and came very near letting both runners advance, although he did get the sphere down to third in time to drive them back.

Watching closely, Frank had discovered that something about Badger's delivery bothered Ready. Badger himself saw this, and he tried a change of pace, but the batter caught it on the handle of his "wagon-tongue," and drove out a "scratch hit" that filled the bases.

Oleson, a Swede, almost as large as Browning, came up to the plate.

"And there were giants in those days," droned Jones, from his position in the field.

"How's that for the giant?" cried Oleson, as he slashed yet another down into Dismal's territory, bringing in the first score and causing the Hartford rooters to "open up."

Jones made a beautiful throw home, which sent Barrows scrambling back to third, which he reached barely in time to save himself, for Ready had lined it down to that bag in short order.

Frank was beginning to wonder if all the Hartford

men were right-field hitters, or was there something in Badger's pitching that caused them to put the balls into that field? Unable to keep still, he walked down toward first, and Browning found an opportunity to say:

"We ought to have Hodge behind the bat. Badger can't use his speed, for Ready can't hold him. Are you going to let those fellows lose this game in the first inning, Merriwell? If you do, I'll kick myself for a week for being chump enough to get out here and swear for nothing."

"It's a handicap not to have Hodge," admitted Frank.

Browning felt like saying it was a handicap not to have Frank in the box, but, fancying he had said enough in that line, he kept still. Badger's face took on a hard look. He motioned for Ready to come down and advanced to meet him. A few words passed between them, while the Hartford "fans" guyed them.

This little talk seemed to bear good fruit, for the Westerner fooled the next batter with two drops, getting two strikes called. Then he tried "coaxers" till three balls were called on him, and again, with every runner taking all the "lead" he dared, the excitement was at a high pitch.

Frank feared for the result.

"Oh, for Hodge!" he thought. "I see now that our handicap means disaster unless the wind changes."

Ready was crouching under the bat, nervous, but de-

termined. Badger took his time, but put terrible speed into the next ball, which he sent over the inner corner of the plate. The batter struck at it, but missed clean.

Plunk! the ball struck in Ready's hand. Thud! it dropped to the ground. But the bases were filled, and the batter was out, for all that Jack had not held the ball. He recovered it so that there was no possibility for the man on third to get home.

Now two men were out, but the bags were filled, and a long, safe hit meant more scores for the visitors. Fleetwood, the Hartford third-baseman, took his turn at the stick. He was a good waiter, and he found just what he wanted, sending it safe over the short-stop, so that two more scores came in.

Badger was pale round the mouth when the next hitter stepped up to the plate. He did not spare Ready. Jack missed the first two balls, being unable to hold them, although he did not let them get past him. Both were strikes, and again Badger tried to "work" the batter, though he did not slacken his speed. Frank was anxious, for he expected to see the freshman catcher let one of those hot ones pass him. Nothing of the kind happened, and, after trying two balls, Buck used a sharp rise and struck the man out.

The college men on the bleachers rose up and howled, but Frank Merriwell was gloomy at heart, though his lips smiled.

"Badger is doing well," he told himself; "but Ready cannot hold him. I'm afraid the handicap is too great. Oh, for Bart Hodge just now!"

The first half of the first inning was over, but Hartford had made three runs.

CHAPTER VI.

READY STEADY.

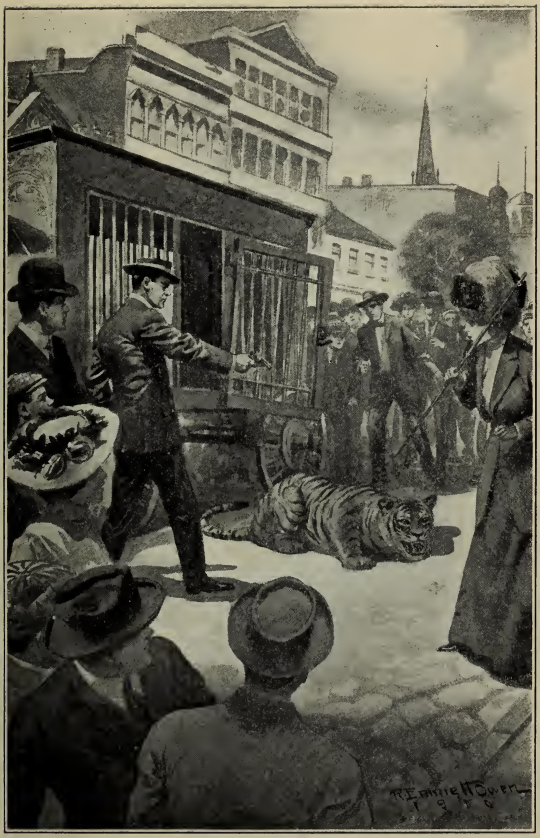
Merriwell saw that Ready could not catch for Buck Badger. There was such an utter absence of anything like team-work that there seemed to be little hope that the game could be won by Merriwell's nine if the battery was not changed. Badger could pitch like a wonder at times, but he rattled Ready, who, as a rule, and in regard to other matters, was as steady as a clock. Ready simply could not do himself justice with Badger in the box. He felt it as well as Merriwell, but he doggedly continued, determined at all events to do his best. Ready was a fellow of infinite pluck, and usually a fellow of infinite confidence. He would have had confidence now, but there was not a thing to build his confidence on.

Merriwell's nine scored four times before it was forced again into the field. Frank sent Badger into the box again, after talking with him awhile.

"You rattle Ready, some way!" Frank told him. "Throw those in curves more, and work in your dropped balls when you can. They get your out curves."

Then, before playing again, he had a few words with Ready.

The first man at the bat got a hit, while the next



The revolver went up, flashing for a moment in the sunshine.
(See page 73)

man took first on balls. The next man at the bat knocked a fly into the hands of Danny Griswold, who was playing short-stop, and the base-runners came back to their places.

Then the men on bases tried to make a double steal, which was partially successful. The fellow on second reached third, but the runner behind him was cut off at second by a throw from Ready. Jack should have thrown to third, but he did not. He threw low to second, and Diamond got it on the bound, touching the runner as that individual was making a desperate slide.

Two men were out, and Frank hoped that Badger would keep the visitors from scoring. Buck might have done so, but somehow he "crossed signals" with Jack, the result being a passed ball that let in a score.

"I'm hot stuff," chirped Ready, as he found Frank back at the bench of the home team. "When I don't fail, I succeed."

"I see you do," answered Frank dryly. "You succeeded in letting in that run."

"Our wires got crossed. Badge gave me an in when I was looking for an out. If you'll put in a pitcher who can throw a curve, I'll surprise you."

"Does Badger rattle you?"

"Refuse me! I think I rattle him."

There was no time for further talk, and the game went on. Buck was nervous, and Frank pitied him, for he

could see that the Westerner might do well with a good catcher behind the bat. Just then Merry did not know of a man to put in Ready's place, for he could see that the Westerner's great speed and queer delivery might be too much for any green catcher who was not used to him.

"Yes," muttered Frank, "the loss of Hodge is the handicap that will cause us to lose the game—if we lose it."

The next man got first on balls, and then the following batter lifted a high foul. Ready got under it, and the Hartfords were retired at last.

"We're done up, Merry," said Rattleton, as the men came in.

"Not yet, old man," declared Frank cheerfully. "I think I'll go behind the bat myself next inning."

"Don't do it!" exclaimed Harry. "I know you can play any old position, Merry, but your place is in the box. With you there, every man on the team will play like a streak. Won't you go in?"

"Badger——"

"Can see that he is bound to lose the game if this keeps on. He's got sense. He won't want to make such a bad record for himself."

"Ready will not be able to judge the double-shoot. I can't use that."

"You won't have to. You can win this game without it."

"I don't know."

"I do! Try it."

Frank was in doubt, and he permitted Badger to pitch one more inning. The Westerner worked hard, but it was plain he had lost confidence, and he was not at his best. Great beads of perspiration stood out on his face. Two men scored, despite him, and the visitors had the lead again.

"I believe I'll try it in the box," Frank mentally decided. "Perhaps I may hold Ready steady. It looks like the only show to win out."

When Merriwell finally went into the box, seeing that it must be done, Badger retired with as good grace as he could, though his dark face was flushed.

"There would be no trouble if it wasn't for Jack Ready!" he asserted. "I can pitch all right, but the pitcher isn't the whole battery!"

"Your delivery bothers him," Merriwell explained. "I believe that you two together are capable of good work, but it will take a lot more practise, and just now we haven't time for practise. You can pitch, Badger, and your best is excellent; but you are irregular. But you'll come round all right. I was talking with Dunstan Kirk about you awhile ago, and he agrees with me. He has been closely watching you all through the game."

"I know it," Badger growled. "I've known it only too well! It has helped to make my pitching wild at times. If he had stayed away, I think I could have done all right all the time. But you'll find that Ready will worry you. He'd worry anybody. The fellow simply can't catch."

"But he can!" Merriwell insisted. "We'll win this game yet!"

The change that came over Jack Ready's work shortly after Merriwell went into the pitcher's box was little short of marvelous. Frank seemed to know how to favor Ready's weak points. And this kept Ready's head steady for other work, so that he made not another wild throw to bases.

Merriwell's nine began to feel their courage rise. It put life into them just to see Frank in the box. Stolen bases on the part of the Hartfords stopped. The swiftness with which Merriwell struck out three batters made the spectators gasp.

From that on Ready was steady, and he and Frank worked together like a battery team of long experience. Frank Merriwell won, in spite of his handicap! And so the Yale rooters, and especially Merriwell's friends and admirers, who were a host in themselves, were roaring wild as they returned from the ball-ground. Merriwell joined Inza and Elsie, while Badger took a car with Winnie.

"I knew that everything was all right, as soon as

you went into the box!" Inza declared. "But up to that minute I was nervous. I was wanting to shake you all the time for not taking Badger's place sooner."

"I felt sorry for Badger," said Elsie. "And I felt sorry for Winnie. She got as red as a beet when Badger left the box, but I know she didn't blame you, Frank. She saw just how it was, and she knew you ought to have gone in sooner, but of course she felt it."

"I was afraid Ready might begin to doubt his own abilities—though probably there is not any danger that he will ever do that! He was just what I expected of him, though, when I pitched. And if Badger and Bart were friends and could, or would, work together, they would make a good battery."

"You will have to coach Badger some," Inza suggested.

"Yes. The captain of the ball-team wants me to. He thinks there is good stuff in both of them, if it can only be properly developed."

The three got out at a transfer station, and waited for another car.

"Dere she comes!" yelled an excited youngster.

The "she" he referred to was not the expected car, but the head of a circus procession, which was parading the principal streets as an advertisement of the performances to be given in the big tents in the suburbs that afternoon and night.

Merriwell and the girls looked in the direction indicated. The crowd at the corner seemed to become thicker. People began to swarm out of the doorways and stream out into the middle of the street.

"And this is scholarly New Haven!" exclaimed Inza. "Wild over a circus parade!"

"We're not in the scholarly part of New Haven!" laughed Frank. "I confess that I like to see a circus parade myself!"

Inza showed evidences that she liked the same thing, for she craned her handsome neck and stood on tiptoe to catch the first glimpse. The nodding plumes on the heads of the horses drawing the gilded band-wagon came into view, and at the same moment the band began to crash forth its resonant music. Children danced and capered, heads were popped out of second-story windows, and the pushing crowd grew denser.

The band-wagon came slowly down the street in the bright spring sunshine, followed by the performers, mounted on well-groomed horses, some of which were beautifully mottled. There were other horses, many of them—a few drawing chariots, driven by Amazons. Then came the funny clown, in his little cart, with his jokes and grimaces for the children.

There was another band-wagon, as gorgeous as the first, at the head of the procession of wild-beast cages. Its music was more deafening than that of the other.

The street-cars seemed to have stopped running, owing to the packed crowds, and Frank and his girl friends remained on the corner curiously watching the scene.

Suddenly a fractious horse jerked away from the man who had been standing at its head holding it, and whirling short about, half-overturned the wagon to which it was hitched and raced wildly down the street. People scattered in every direction, several being knocked down in the stampeding rush.

The horse climbed to the sidewalk, with wheels bumping the curbing, trying to get out of the way of some men who were seeking to stop it. Almost before they were aware of it, horse and wagon seemed fairly on top of Merriwell and the girls. Elsie gave a startled cry, and dashed across the street, where the people were falling back out of the way, with women pulling nervously and excitedly at their children.

A child fell headlong, and the horse seemed about to stamp it, when Frank, with a quick leap, picked it up from under the very feet of the runaway, and dropped it safely at its mother's side. Then a tremendous roar ascended. Turning, Frank saw that Inza and Elsie had disappeared. He did not at first know the cause of the roar.

The horse, veering again and wheeling sharply, had hurled the wagon against a cage in which was confined a full-grown tiger. This was an open cage—that is, the screening, wooden, outer shell had been removed,

showing the big beast of the jungle, with its keeper in circus costume, seated in the center of the cage on a low stool.

Against the door of this cage the bounding wagon had struck heavily—so heavily that the lock was torn away or broken, and the cage door pulled open. The roar that went up was a roar of alarm and fright. And it increased in intensity when the striped beast, with nervously flicking tail, leaped past its keeper and into the street, where it crouched, not knowing what to do with its newly found freedom.

The street was in the wildest tumult. The horses drawing the cage had been brought to a stop by the driver. But another horse, frightened by the din and the runaway, broke loose just at that time, and came tearing along, with flaming eyes and distended nostrils, like a Malay running amuck.

Frank sprang toward the head of this horse, for the peril to the stampeding people seemed great. But the animal veered and passed by, dragging Merry a few yards by the shafts and hurling him to the ground.

The sight he beheld as he scrambled up was enough to stop the beating of his heart. Inza and Elsie had tried to again cross the street. Inza had been knocked down by the horse, and lay unconscious, while Elsie had been swept on in the crowd. More than that, the keeper of the tiger, who had courageously leaped after the terrible beast with his spearlike iron goad, hoping to be able to

prod and cow it into subjection, had been knocked flat also by the horse, his iron goad flying out of his hand and into the street.

Though Frank was some distance away, he started toward the tiger, which had crouched and seemed about to spring on Inza. But before he could take a step, he saw Elsie run from the crowd toward Inza and the tiger. Her face was very white, but it was filled with the look of high courage which inspired her. She realized the peril of any attempt she could make to save Inza, and she boldly took the risk.

A hundred voices were screaming at the big brute, which crouched with undulating tail and open jaws; but not another person seemed to be moving toward Elsie to render her assistance, with the exception of Frank Merriwell.

He saw the girl pick up the iron goad. Then Elsie Bellwood leaped between the tiger and Inza. As she did so she lifted the goad. The tiger turned its attention from Inza to Elsie, and the latter struck at it, as if the goad were a spear.

Frank Merriwell heard the click of a revolver at his side. He saw a man shakily lifting it.

"Permit me!" he gasped, and plucked it from the man's hand.

The revolver went up, flashing for a moment in the sunshine. A quick, sharp report rang out. The bullet, sent with true and steady aim, by the hand of Frank

Merriwell, ploughed through the tiger's brain, and the beast flattened out convulsively, and began to kick and writhe in its death agonies.

Hearing the report and seeing the animal fall, Elsie's uplifted hand fell, she swayed like a wind-blown vine, and dropped heavily down across the form of Inza Burrage.

CHAPTER VII.

FRIENDS.

The crack of the revolver and the fall of the tiger seemed to break the spell that had held and made cowards of the throng. A dozen men leaped toward the girls. But Merriwell reached them first. He lifted Elsie, who had merely fallen in a faint, as he saw; and, passing her to a student whom he recognized, he bent anxiously over Inza.

There was a bruise and a fleck of blood on the upper part of her face.

"Inza!" he said, lifting her tenderly and seeking to arouse her. "Are you much hurt, Inza?"

The words and tone seemed to call her back from the land of death. She moaned feebly, and tried to put up a hand. Half-lifting her in his arms, he looked around.

"Is there a surgeon here!" he called.

Elsie came back to consciousness with a shiver, and heard him call. Her face had been very white, but it became pale as death. The sight of Inza's bruised face and limp form upheld by Merriwell seemed to blur her brain again. She caught at the arm of the student who was holding her, and by a great effort kept her senses.

"Is she dead, Frank?" she whispered.

"No!" he answered. "I don't know how much she may be hurt, though."

The tiger had ceased to struggle, the crowds were writhing, a babel of sound that was confused and confusing filled the air. The circus procession had come to a halt, with the exception of the forward band, which was blaring away far down the street.

A doctor came out of the crowd. Other doctors proffered their services, for Inza was not the only one who had been knocked over by the rush of the horses. The injured tiger-keeper was picked up and bundled into an ambulance.

"Right across here!" said the doctor who had answered Merriwell's call. Then he led the way into an apothecary's.

"Nothing serious!" he announced, a minute later, when he had made his examination. "The young lady will be all right in a day or two."

He spoke of Inza, and both Merry and Elsie sent up fervent sighs of relief.

* * * * * * *

Coming softly into the room which Elsie Bellwood occupied, Inza Burrage saw Elsie in tears.

"What is it, dear?" Inza asked, going up and putting her arms about Elsie's neck.

Except for a telltale bit of courtplaster, Inza showed

no sign of the dangerous and exciting experiences through which she had that day passed.

"Don't! don't!" Elsie pleaded, with a little shiver. "If you knew what was in my heart you wouldn't speak to me, Inza Burrage!"

"Why, dear? Why wouldn't I speak to you—you who have proved yourself the most heroic and courageous girl in all New Haven?"

"It wasn't courage half so much as it was fright. And if you knew the thoughts I had!"

Inza kissed her.

"What?"

Elsie turned on her a horrified face.

"Inza, when I saw you knocked down by that horse, the awful wish came into my heart that you might be killed. And even when I saw the tiger about to leap on you, I couldn't drive that thought away. I have been hating you in a way that I never thought I could hate anybody! You see, I began to fear that you were trying to come between me and Frank; and if you had been — killed—there—would—have—been—an—end —of—that!"

"But you rushed between me and the tiger. And you fought the beast with that goad. You, a girl, standing between me and such a terror as that! Frank has told me all about it—about how brave you were! It was beautiful!"

"When I felt how wicked my thoughts was, there came

an awful revulsion of feeling; and then I rushed into the street, not caring if I was killed, if I could only save you. I felt that the sacrifice of my life, even, if it were necessary, was demanded to pay for those dreadful thoughts. I knew the danger, Inza, but that hideous thought made me brave."

"You are naturally brave, Elsie! I feel that I owe my life to you."

"And I wished you dead!" said Elsie self-reproachfully. "I can never forget it. Wished you dead when you were knocked down and when the tiger threatened you. Inza, it was something awful!"

"It was because you love Frank!"

"And you love Frank! You have confesed as much."

"Perhaps I do. I hardly know myself. But you have shown to-day that you are much more worthy of him than I am. Don't worry about any of those troubles any more."

She straightened up, with the look of a renouncing queen, while her dark eyes shone like stars.

"Elsie, I will go away from here if it is necessary. I will not disturb you and Frank."

"I take back all I said the other day!" Elsie quivered. "I retract every word. They were selfish, jealous, hateful words. They led me to murderous thoughts—for those thoughts about you to-day were really murderous. You shall not go away! Not unless I go away, too!"

"Then we can be friends, dear!" said Inza, laying a

hand softly on the golden head. "That is what we will try to be, if you will, in spite of everything."

"Yes," Elsie assented, "though I am not worthy to be your friend."

"Then we will be friends, dear!"

"We are friends!" Elsie exclaimed impulsively, drawing the hand down and kissing it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GUN CLUB.

"Baw Jawve, it would be sport if a fellah could draw on a grouse on a Scotch moor, don't you 'now! It would be something great to knock such a bird into the heather. There really isn't any shooting in this country to be compared to that, don't you 'now!"

Willis Paulding drawled this in his affected style, and then swung the handsome English Greener hammerless to his shoulder and squinted down the barrels as if he fancied he heard the whirring of a moor cock's wings and felt the thrill of the sportsman tingling through his veins.

"What's the matter with partridge and woodcock shooting in New England? Or quail shooting in the West and South? Or duck shooting on the Southwest coast? Or prairie-chicken and grouse shooting in the far West and Rocky Mountains?" demanded Merriwell, who had arrived on the grounds of the gun club with Bart Hodge and was taking his gun out of its case.

Paulding flushed.

"If you had ever shot grouse across the big pond, you 'now, you wouldn't ask such a question, Merriwell!"

"I have shot grouse on the other side of the big pond, and it is fine sport, true enough. But there is just as fine shooting to be had in America. You make me tired.

You want to act like an Englishman, Paulding, but it is an insult to the English, for your imitation is really disgraceful. A true Englishman is very much a man!"

"And Paulding is a mere thing!" snapped Hodge.

"He isn't worth noticing, don't you 'now!" sneered Paulding, moving away with the members of the Chickering set. "He is always slinging insulting things at me. It's mere jealousy, don't you 'now, that makes him act so. Baw Jawve, if I was as jealous as Merriwell, I'd go drown myself!"

"He is always slinging insults at us in the same way!" Ollie Lord breathlessly declared, looking as fierce as he could and lifting himself on his tiptoes to increase his fighting height.

"I wouldn't let the thing worry me," purred Rupert Chickering. "Merriwell is so spoiled by flattery that he is hardly responsible for what he says. I never like to hold harsh feeling against any one."

"I'd like to pull the wetch'eth nothe!" lisped Lew Veazie, looking quite as fierce as Ollie Lord. "It would therve him wight if I thould walk up to him thome day and thimply pull hith nothe!"

"But he might pull yours!" Julian Ives warned. "That wouldn't be pleasant, you know."

Julian Ives, in the perfumed sanctity of Chickering's rooms, often looked lovingly at himself and his wonderful bang in the long mirror and dreamed the heroic things he would like to do and the revenges he would

like to carry out, but his actual courage had been at a very low ebb ever since his humiliating experience as a member of the Eskemo dog-team driven by the cowboy, Bill Higgins. He was likely to remember that a long while.

"They're not worth talking about—none of Merriwell's crowd!" snarled Gene Skelding, as if anxious to change the drift of the unpleasant conversation, for he had been given cause to fear and hate Merriwell and his friends quite as much as any other individual who claimed the companionship and friendship of the immaculate Rupert. "Let me see your gun, Willis!"

He took the Greener, snapped it open to see if it was loaded, then winked at Chickering.

The members of the Yale Gun Club were rapidly coming on the ground, together with a number of noted New Haven shots and others interested in trap shooting. Browning and Rattleton appeared, and Diamond, Dismal, and several others of Merry's set were seen approaching.

"I thought Bart Hodge was sick?" said Tilton Hull. "But I see he is out again."

"When I heard he wath thick I hoped he would never get well. He ith a howwid cwecher! Whenever I go near him he thnapth at me like a bulldog."

"As if you were a bulldog?" queried Skelding, who at times seemed to delight in teasing certain members of this delectable set.

"The idea!" exclaimed Ollie Lord indignantly, putting

a hand caressingly on Veazie's shoulder. "A bulldog! If Veazie is anything, he is like the cunning little dog I had once. It was the darlingest little poodle! and I simply loved it!"

"Just fawncy!" sniffed Willis Paulding.

But Lew Veazie seemed pleased. He put up a hand to touch the caressing arm.

"You're another, Ollie!" he beamed. "I always did like poodles!"

"A pair of poodles!" said Skelding, and again winked meaningly at Rupert, who snatched the cap from the head of Julian Ives and flung it into the air. Skelding took a snap-shot at it as it fell.

"If that cap is damaged," said Ives, smoothing his precious bang which the brisk breeze began to flirt about, "I'll make you fellows pay for it. That's flat!"

But Julian's alarm was premature. Not a shot had touched it.

The members of the Chickering set continued the delightful sport of snatching hats and caps from each other's heads and shooting at them with Paulding's fine English gun; but the only damage done was by the falls the articles received, for not a shot touched any of them.

"Of course, fellahs, a moor cock doesn't fly that way," Willis drawlingly explained, in extenuation of the poor shooting. "He doesn't go right up and down, you 'now.

He has wings, don't you 'now, and flies straight away, like a shot. I could hit a grouse without any trouble, but this kind of shooting! The best shot in England would be bothered with it."

"We'll have a try at the clay pigeons and blackbirds soon," Chickering comfortingly promised.

"But, gwathious, I've twied them, and they're harder to hit than thethe are! I could do better if I could only keep my eyeth open, but the minute I begin to pull the twigger my eyeth go shut, and I can't help it."

They had turned round and were retracing their way toward Merriwell and his friends without noticing it. Suddenly Lew Veazie jumped straight up into the air, clapped a hand smartly against one of his legs, and began to dance a hornpipe. At almost the same moment a shot was fired by some one.

"Thay, fellowth, I'm thyot!" he gasped, turning deathly pale. "Honeth, thith ithn't a joke! I'm thyot! Ow! It burnth like fire!"

"Where?" Ollie anxiously asked, staring at the dancing youth, and looking quickly about to make sure that no loaded gun was pointed in his direction. The others looked about, too.

"This reckless shooting ought to be forbidden!" declared Skelding, regardless of the fact that the shooting he and his friends had been doing was of the most reckless character. Veazie dropped down on the ground, and began to pull up one leg of his trousers.

"It stwuck me wight here!" he gasped. "I think it must have gone thwough my leg. I can feel the blood twickling down."

Ollie went down on his knees and began to help him, and together they soon had the injured spot revealed to their anxious eyes. They beheld a reddish place, with a center like a pin jab, but not a drop of blood.

"It was a spent shot!" said Rupert wisely. "It came from a distance. But it was a very reckless thing to do to fire at all in this direction."

"Let me take a look at it!" said Julian Ives, crowding forward and stooping to inspect it. As he did so, he straightened up with a little screech, and clapped a hand to his hips.

"Wow!" he howled, dancing round as Veazie had done. "I'm shot, too! Fellows, this is awful! I believe I'm killed! Who is doing this?"

"Thuch weckleth thyoothing I never thaw!" groaned Veazie, though he was much relieved to discover that he had not received a deadly hurt. "Thomebody mutht be awwested for thith. I thouldn't be thurpwithed if it ith one of Merriwell's fwiendth!"

"Wow!" howled Julian, falling to the ground, and writhing about in his agony. "I'm dead! I never had anything hurt me so! Wow-ow-ow!"

Ollie Lord clapped a hand to his head and executed a quickstep. He pulled off his cap and rubbed furiously,

expecting to feel the blood come away on his fingers, for he also fancied he had been shot.

"Goodness!" he gasped. "Whoever is shooting this way ought to be jailed. We will all be killed in five minutes. That tore a hole in my scalp, sure!"

Rupert Chickering, who was beginning to look grave and anxious, next jumped up into the air, forgetting his dignity; while Willis Paulding sat down with a suddenness that jarred the ground, and began to declaim in a quick, nervous way and without the slightest imitation of an English accent.

Then Lew Veazie, who had been rubbing his injured leg and looking surprisedly and dubiously about, leaped to his feet with another howl and went dancing off from his friends.

"Felloth, it ith hornets!" he shrieked, beginning to fight and slap with his cap and his hands. "Ow! wow! They're thtinging me to death! Help me, thomebody!"

"Hornets!" shrieked Ollie Lord, leaping up and following his chum. "Fellows, the air is full of them!"

Tilton Hull began to dig fiercely at his high collar.

"There is one down my neck!" he screeched.

He recklessly tore the collar away and began to dig with his nails in a wild search for the thing that had stung him, and which he fancied he felt boring its way still farther down his back. Julian Ives took his hand from his hip and slapped it against his breast, where a

red-hot lance seemed to have been driven with torturing suddenness. Then he began to tear away his beautiful necktie and to recklessly rumple his gorgeous shirt front.

"This is awful!" he exclaimed. "Where are the things coming from? The air is full of them! Wow! Another struck me in the arm!"

Lew Veazie was rolling over and over. Their outcries attracted the attention of Merriwell and his friends, and also the attention of a number of others who had come upon the grounds.

"What are those idiots up to?" grumbled Hodge, who had no patience with the antics of the Chickering set. "They've been making fools of themselves ever since they came out here. Awhile ago, they were recklessly burning powder and hurling shot all round. Now they act as if they were crazy."

"Must be playing some sort of game of circus!" guessed Browning. "They're tumbling about like acrobats—or fools!"

"And howling like wild Indians!" said Danny. "I think they are playing a Wild West."

"They ought to have Bill Higgins here, then, to make the show complete," Merriwell remarked, with a smile. "But seriously, I don't believe they're playing anything. Those yells sound real."

"Help!' howled Willis Paulding, forgetting his drawl. "We're being stung to death!"

Willis was down on the ground, soiling his beautiful trousers and digging furiously at his head.

"Hornets!" shrieked Ollie Lord, kicking about not far from Paulding.

"Wow!" screeched Lew Veazie, bobbing up and down like a cork in water when a fish is nibbling at the bait.

"Take 'em off!" begged Julian Ives, neglecting his lovely bang and scratching with great energy at the places where he had been stung.

"We're in a nest of hornets, or bees, or something!" exclaimed Rupert Chickering, becoming decidedly belligerent in his efforts to rid himself of the stinging creatures.

"Are you going to stand there and see us killed?" Skelding demanded. "I tell you, we are being stung!"

"Glad to know it!" declared Bart. "You need it. It's hopeless, though, to expect that the hornets will sting any sense into your crowd."

Merriwell started toward the screeching, dancing, jigging, fighting youths, quickening his steps into a run, and his friends followed at his heels. As he did so he heard the loud and discordant jangle of a cowbell furiously shaken.

A man, a woman, and a boy had come in sight, appearing from behind the seats allotted to spectators. Evidently they had emerged but a minute before from a strip of timber that cut off the view of a farmhouse that was on the right of the gun club grounds and some

distance away. They were running as fast as they could, and were shouting something as they came on. The boy, a lanky chap of fourteen or fifteen, was vigorously shaking the bell. The man carried a large pail, and the woman swung a roll of dirty cloth.

"Hold on! hold on!" the man howled. "Jest handle 'em gently, can't ye?"

The Chickering set, as well as Merriwell's friends, heard him.

"Oh, yes! we'll handle 'em gently!" snarled Skelding, slapping at one of the stinging things and crushing it with his hand. He saw then that it was a bee. He jerked his hand away and stuck his fingers into his mouth. Then jumped up and began again to hop around.

"It run its stinger into my finger an inch!" he growled.

"Hold on! hold on!" the old man was howling.

"I'm holding on!' cried Rupert, smashing away at a handful of bees which seemed to be settling down on him all at once.

"You're killing 'em!" screeched the old woman.

"Yes, we're killing 'em!" Skelding answered, flailing away as if he had gone crazy. "I'd like to kill a million in a minute! I can't kill them fast enough! I'd like to welt 'em with a club and smash a regiment at a blow!"

Lew Veazie threw himself on the ground, drew his hat down over his head, and began to kick and shriek.

"You're jest a tantalizin' 'em!" panted the farmer.

Merriwell stopped and laughed. The whole thing was too ridiculously funny for him to do otherwise.

"They're swarmin'!" shouted the boy, rattling away with the bell as if his life depended on it.

"Yes, I see they are!" howled Julian Ives. "They're swarming all over me!"

"Don't hurt 'em!" the farmer begged. He was only a few feet away, and panting on, almost breathless.

"Don't kill 'em!" whined the old woman. "They're my bees!"

Her words reached Lew Veazie. For a moment the kicking legs were stilled, though the hat was not withdrawn.

"Take 'em away then, pleathe!" he begged, from under the hat. "I don't want to hurt your beethe, but they're hurting me! Take 'em away, pleathe!"

The boy stopped his jangling bell.

"They are honey bees!" he said. Then added, as if he feared this might not be clear to the intellects of city-bred youths: "They make honey!"

"I'll tantalize them!" Skelding fiercely exclaimed, striking at the bees that were hovering round his head. "I'll treat 'em gently! Oh, yes! I'll pick them off very tenderly and put them in your lap, old lady! I don't think! Keep your old bees at home!"

"But they're swarming!" the old farmer exclaimed. "They're going out to hunt a new hive. We've been follerin' 'em."

Then Lew Veazie began to bellow again, more frantically than ever. A large crowd was gathering, men hurrying from all directions, Merriwell and his friends had arrived on the scene.

"Ow-wow!" Veazie shrieked. "They're worthe than ever!"

For a few seconds he had not been troubled except by the stings previously given, which pained intensely. Merriwell looked down and saw a big bunch of bees gathering along the top of Veazie's collar at the back.

"They're killing me!" Veazie screeched, rubbing a hand into this mass and leaping to his feet.

But the pile grew. The bees seemed to drop by scores right out of the air upon him. He started to run. The old woman began to shriek, and the boy commenced again to jangle the bell.

"You've got the queen!" howled the old man. "Jest keep still a minute! You have got the queen!"

"Is this a card-game?" drawled Browning.

"Lew Veazie is the little joker this time!" droned Dismal.

"That's because he is so sweet!" declared Bink. "Don't you know the boy said these are honey bees? They're going to carry Veazie away and turn him into honey and the honey comb."

"If you talk that way I'll have to swear off on honey!" exclaimed Browning, with a wry face.

"Hold on! Jest hold on!" the farmer was begging.

Veazie started to run, and the farmer reached out a hand for the purpose of detaining him.

"They ain't stingin' you!" he insisted. "Jest keep your hands down and keep still an' they won't do a thing to you!"

"Oh, they won't do a thing to him!" howled Danny.

Veazie dropped flat to the ground.

"Jest hold on!" begged the farmer. "Jest hold on! They're lightin' round the queen!"

Then he dipped his big hand into the pail and began to ladle out the water and drench the bees with it, while the old woman flailed with the roll of cloth to keep them away from her, and the farmer's boy, dancing up and down in his excitement, jangled the bell like an alarm clock.

"Jest hold on!" the farmer urged, as Veazie showed signs of rolling over. "I'll git my fingers on that there queen in a minute, and then I'll have 'em. I wouldn't lost this swarm fer five dollars. Jest hold on a minute!"

"Veazie's queen!" some one sang out from the heart of the surging, talking, sensation-loving throng. "I always knew you were attractive, Veazie, but I didn't know females rushed at you in that warm way. Yes, jest hold on a little, Veazie. We don't have a circus like this every day, and we want to get the worth of our money."

Ollie Lord, Chickering, Hull, Skelding, and the others seemed to have been almost deserted by the bees, that were now swarming down upon the hapless lisper, drawn

there by the fact that the queen had found lodgment somewhere on Veazie's neck.

Under the influence of the farmer's commands, Veazie ceased to kick and strike, and lay like a gasping fish while the man deluged him with water.

"Thay, I'm dwoning!" he gasped at last. "Thith ith worthe than being thtung!"

But, in truth, the deluge of cold water took away something of the fiery pain of the stings.

"Just hold on!" cried the farmer again.

Then he thrust a thumb and finger down into the writhing wet mass of bees, drew out the queen, which by its size and shape he readily distinguished from the others, and began to rake the bees into the new, empty pail.

When he had the most of them in, the old woman threw the cloth over them. The farmer was now down on his knees, and the bees that were still on Veazie he began to pick off and pop into the pail as if they were grains of gold.

"I've got 'em!" he triumphantly declared. "This is my fu'st swarm this spring. I thought the blamed things was goin' to git away, but I've got 'em. Giner'ly they light on a tree when they're swarmin', or on somethin' green!"

"That's why they struck Veazie!" some one shouted from the crowd.

"Can I get up?" Veazie gasped. "I'm wetter than the thea!"

"Yes, young man, an' I'm 'bliged to ye. The rest of 'em will find their way to the queen, I guess. When these bees makes honey, if you'll come over I'll give you a hunk."

CHAPTER IX.

SHOOTING.

Lew Veazie was a sorry sight when he got up from the ground. The water had converted the soil into mud, which plastered him now from head to foot. And here and there on his face and hands were red spots made by the bee stings.

Gene Skelding was flailing at some bees that did not seem to have discovered that the queen was captured and their rightful domicile was the farmer's pail. There were other bees also at liberty, and one of them, angered no doubt by the turn of events, popped a stinger into the cuticle of Bink Stubbs.

"Scatt!" shrieked Bink. "Get away from here, or I'll murder you!"

Browning moved back, for a bee seemed to be making a desperate effort to single him out as a victim. Then he stuck his pipe into his mouth, quickly fished out some tobacco, and crammed the bowl full, and lighted it.

"Smoke 'em off!" he said. "That's a good way to fight bees."

"And tobacco smoke keeps away other female critters!" laughed Danny, trying rather vainly to imitate the peculiar quality in the farmer's speech. "That's the rea-

son you have never been popular with the fair. Now there is Veazie——"

"What about cigarettes?" drawled Browning, making a fog round his head. "Don't let the kettle call the pot Blackie! The most disgusting thing ever created is a smoker of cigarettes!"

"Yah!" growled Danny, taking out a cigarette. "Lend me a match, old man."

And Browning lent him a match. Bink was rubbing earnestly at the stung spot.

"I'll never see honey again without thinking of this."

"Which honey do you mean?" asked Danny. "I heard you calling a chambermaid Honey the other evening. You must have thought her sweet!"

"And I heard one of them calling you a fool the other evening. She must have thought you an idiot."

"Thomebody get me a cab!" begged Veazie, rubbing his stings and ruefully regarding himself. "Thay, fellowth, thith ith awful! I'm a thight! Get a cab, thomebody, and take me home. I'm thick!"

"No cab here," said Skelding, who was also anxious to get away from the joking and guying crowd. "But I see a carriage over there. Yes, two of them."

"Get a cawiage—anything!" moaned Veazie. "Take me to the hothpital, take me to a laundwy, take me to a bath—anywhere, quick!"

The exodus of Veazie and his friends was followed by the return of Merriwell and his comrades to the traps.

Hodge had not been long out of a sick-bed, and looked thin and weak. He walked with Merriwell. The other members of the flock had forgiven him for the rancorous and sulky spirit which had made him refuse to catch in the ball-game against Hartford, in which Buck Badger had pitched, but they had not forgotten it. They were courteous, but they were not cordial, and Hodge felt it.

Buck Badger came upon the ground, but without a gun. He was alone, too, and he kept away from Merriwell's crowd. He had not learned to like Merriwell's friends, any of them, and he detested Hodge.

Having taken his gun from its case, Merriwell put it together, and opened a box of loaded shells, which he placed on the ground. The gun was a beautiful twelve-gage hammerless, of late design and American manufacture, bored for trap shooting. Hodge's gun was so nearly like it that they could scarcely be told apart.

Morton Agnew and Donald Pike came on the grounds before the shooting began. Merriwell observed that Badger affected not to notice them, but the Westerner was plainly annoyed.

"Perhaps you would like to shoot!" said Merriwell, going over to Badger with his gun. "I can let you have the use of my gun. Hodge has one just like it, and all our other fellows have good guns. So, if you'd like to shoot! It's all right, and as good as they make them."

The Kansan was plainly pleased.

"And I can let you have shells."

"I'll take the gun, Merriwell," he said, balancing it in his hands and looking it over. "But I can't let you furnish shells, when I can buy all I want right here on the grounds. And there is no reason why you can't shoot with it, too."

"None at all, old man, only I thought likely you wouldn't want to mix in with our crowd. I can shoot Bart's gun."

Badger flushed and his face darkened. He was on the point of saying something bitter against Hodge.

"I didn't intend to shoot when I came out," he said, choking down the angry utterance, "or I should have brought a gun. In fact, I didn't start for this place at all. But I'm here now, and I reckon my fingers would never get done itching if I couldn't get to pull a trigger. I used to shoot some on the ranch, you know, and I hope I haven't lost anything whatever of the knack. If I should beat your score now?"

"You're welcome to."

"Of course I'm more used to a revolver and rifle than to a shotgun, but I allow I know a kink or two about trap shooting, just the same."

The rattle and click of guns being put together, the snapping of locks, and the chatter, made pleasant music for gun lovers, as Frank returned to his friends.

"You didn't let him have your gun?" growled Hodge.

"Yes; I will shoot with yours."

"You're welcome to, of course; but I shouldn't have done it."

"Here goes to kill the first bird!" cried Danny, ambling out with a repeating shotgun in his hands.

"If you don't hit it first time, you can just sheep on kooting—I mean keep on shooting!" jollied Rattleton.

"I wish there was a bee round here to sting him!" sighed Bink, as Danny faced the trap. "I'm so sore from laughing that I know I can't hit anything."

"You couldn't hit anything, anyway!" said Bruce, putting some shells into his gun.

"I can hit you!" Bink growled, lunging at him.

"I meant anything small!" said Bruce, brushing aside Bink's blow as if it had been a fly. "Shoo! Don't bother me, or I may get one of these shells stuck."

A trap was sprung, and Danny blazed away.

"Missed!" said Dismal.

"And Danny is our crack shot!" moaned Bink. "The papers will say to-night that our shooting was like a lot of schoolgirls."

"How?" asked Merriwell.

"All misses! Yah! Watch me smash one of those blackbirds into dust."

Bink went forward with much seeming confidence—and missed, too.

"Of course I didn't want to take away all the courage of you fellows by hitting the first bird," he blandly explained. "But I could have done it."

The conditions for shooting were fair, for the wind was not so strong as it had been earlier in the day. Several shots were made, together with a number of hits. Then Buck Badger's name was called, and he went up to the line with Merriwell's gun. One of the boys who was manipulating the traps sprung the middle one, and the bird shot swiftly off to the right. It was a rather difficult target, but Badger knocked the clay bird into dust.

"A good shot!" some one called from the crowd.

"It was a good shot!" Merriwell commented.

Dismal Jones followed Badger, and knocked down the straightaway bird which was sprung from the right-hand trap.

"Now the earth will fall!" squeaked Bink, for Browning's name was called, and Bruce got up lazily from the ground and walked slowly into position. Bruce disliked a light gun, and carried a heavy ten-gage, notwithstanding the fact that trap-shooting rules required the users of such guns to shoot from a longer distance. He believed that the heavier weight and heavier load more than offset this.

Danny stuck his fingers into his ears as Bruce stood ready to fire the "cannon." Then there was a thunderous report, as the clay bird flew through the air, and was knocked to pieces by the impact of the shot.

"Was it an earthquake?" asked Bink, falling back on the ground. "He'll be wanting to shoot a Krupp gun next!"

"Watch me this time!" said Danny, as he stepped into position. "It's easier for me to do difficult things. If those traps would only throw out a dozen birds at once, I'd show you some nice work!"

"Yes, you might get one out of the whole flock," said Diamond. "If it was a very dense flock, you might get two."

Ten rounds had been fired, and two birds were to be thrown now at the same time at unknown angles.

"Ready?" asked the boy.

"Pull!" commanded Danny, throwing up his gun.

The birds flew, but Danny did not shoot.

"I thought one was going to jump out of the right-hand trap," he grinned, "and it didn't."

"Give him another chance," said Dismal. "He oughtn't to be forgiven for anything, but we'll forgive him."

"Spit on your hands!" some one yelled.

Danny put down his gun, very deliberately spat on his hands, then took up his gun again.

"Pull!" he commanded.

Two birds flew—one from the right-hand trap and one from the middle trap. Bang! bang! Danny fired at both, but the birds sailed on and descended in the grass.

"These shells aren't any good!" he asserted, looking wonderingly into the powder-stained barrels of the gun. "Or else this gun isn't choked right for trap shooting. I held on both of those birds."

"You mean you aren't choked right for trap shooting," said Bink, as Danny came back.

"I'll choke you!" Danny cried, hurling himself on Stubbs and gripping him by the throat.

"Stop it!" commanded Bruce, as they struggled on the grass. "If you don't, we'll fire you out of the crowd."

Jack Diamond did the best shooting this time, cleanly killing both birds. Merriwell and others struck both birds, but Diamond made the cleanest kill. Danny ambled out aga with his repeater, and this time brought down a bird.

"Talk about easy things!" he spouted, thrusting out his chest as he pranced back.

"That's right!" howled Bink. "You're the easiest thing on the planet. That bird was broken and all ready to fall to pieces when it left the trap. I paid the boy to fix it for you."

"You're another!" Danny declared. "I hit that bird fair and square. See if you can do better."

"I'm going to hit both!" Bink declared, and for a wonder he did.

"Take me home to mommer!" squealed Danny.

"Talk about shooting!" exclaimed Bink, sticking his hat on the back of his head. "What's the matter with that, eh?"

"Oh, you're a wonder!" exclaimed Danny. "Accidents are bound to happen sometimes, you know."

Browning made clean misses, and Diamond got only one bird. The shooting of most of the others was not of the best.

"I suppose there isn't any way to clip the wings of those things?" grumbled Dismal, who had missed. "They get up and get away so fast that I can't pull on them half the time. I could hit my bird if I could find it. But when I point my gun at it and pull the trigger, it isn't there."

"Pull ahead of it," Merriwell advis .

"Yes, you must use ahead work," said Bink. "If you have a head, that is what it's for. That's the way I did, and you saw the result. I can get 'em every time now."

As the shooting continued, it was seen that Badger was doing good work, though nothing at all phenomenal. He stepped into position with an air of confidence, fired quickly, and then stepped back. But he kept away from Merriwell's crowd, mingling with others from Yale whom he knew.

Hodge's score and the Westerner's were nearly alike. Hodge saw it and squirmed. Then Merriwell, who had made only one miss, scored two "goose eggs," and Badger climbed up to him.

"I don't like that," Bart grumbled. "You're not doing your best, Merry. Badger may beat you."

Merriwell was cleaning out and cooling his gun—Bart's gun—which both were using, and which had

grown hot and foul from rapid firing. The first round of twenty shots was nearing its close. Only four more shots were to be fired in it, at two pairs of birds. Badger had to his credit thirteen hits and three misses, and Merriwell the same.

"If you should miss one of the four and Badger should hit them all you would be beaten!" Bart urged uneasily. "And I don't want you to be beaten by him. I'm afraid you are going to tie. I want you to beat him. I can't stand it to have him crowing round."

Merriwell smiled placidly.

"Don't steam so, Hodge. It just heats you up, and makes you unhappy. If Buck Badger should beat me, I don't see that it would make a great difference. I haven't been shooting for a record this afternoon."

"All right," said Hodge. "However good your intentions may be, that fellow will never give you honest credit for them."

The shooting had recommenced, and Hodge walked back to the crowd, plainly disgruntled.

Merriwell clutched a handful of shells and went over to Badger.

"Try these, Buck!" he said. "They're a good deal better than those you've been using. I had them loaded very carefully under my own supervision for this kind of work, and you'll find them very fine. They're just suited to that gun, too. You have really been shooting at a disadvantage to-day."

A smile came to the dark face of the Westerner—a stern, determined sort of smile.

"Better not give them to me, perhaps, Merry. I'm going to beat you if I can. We're tied now. If you miss, I shall get you. Better not give me any advantages."

"You can't beat me!" said Frank, looking straight into the eyes of the Kansan.

"Do you mean that you haven't been trying to shoot? I've been watching you, and I allow you have been doing your level best."

"You haven't watched closely, then. I threw away two shots awhile ago. I could hardly miss them when I tried. But I'm not anxious to beat any one to-day. I didn't come out here to make a record."

Badger flushed.

"All right. Throw away another shot and I'll beat you."

"I'll not throw away another, and you can't beat me, though you may tie me."

He was smiling and good-humored, and the Kansan tried to be.

Badger took the next two straight, and Merriwell did the same.

"I'm afraid he is going to tie you!" grumbled Hodge.

"What's the score?" asked Rattleton, roused to the fact that Badger and Merriwell were now really shooting against each other.

"Toodness, a guy—I mean, goodness, a tie! Don't let him beat you, anyway, Merry!"

"That comes from being too good-natured," growled Hodge. "He wouldn't be anywhere near you, if you'd tried."

Twice again both brought down their birds. Only a pair was left now to each. Every member of the gun club present, together with those who, like Badger, were being permitted to shoot through the favor of members, and all the spectators, as well, knew now that Badger and Merriwell had finally pitted themselves against each other in a friendly shooting contest, with the chances in favor of a tie.

Hodge was hardly able to breathe, and Harry Rattleton was fidgeting uneasily. The spectators craned their necks as Badger, whose trial came first, walked into position with an air of easy confidence, that dark, determined smile disfiguring his face.

"I'm afraid your chances are gone, Merriwell!" droned Dismal Jones. "'We never miss the water till the well runs dry.'"

"Keep still," grunted Browning, "or you'll make me nervous!"

"I wish somebody would make Badger nervous!" wailed Bink.

"Sing out that a queen bee is coming for him!" urged Danny, in an undertone.

"Keep still!" said Merriwell.

Badger balanced his gun, called "Pull!" and threw it into position as the birds sprang from the trap.

A deafening explosion followed. The gun was torn to pieces and Badger was hurled backward to the ground.

CHAPTER X.

BADGER'S CHALLENGE.

Merriwell and others sprang toward him to offer their aid. Frank could hardly believe what he had seen and heard. He feared Badger was seriously or fatally injured, but was relieved before he reached the Kansan to see the latter rise unsteadily to his feet.

Badger looked dazedly about, then down at his numbed left hand and arm. They felt dead, and he could hardly lift them. But he saw they were not mangled.

"I hope you are not hurt!" Frank exclaimed.

The blood rushed in a great wave into the Westerner's dark face, and he gave Frank a strange look.

"Your gun has gone to pieces!" he said gruffly.

"But I hope you are not hurt. There are other guns. I don't understand how it happened."

There was a suspicious light in Badger's eyes.

"I'll not be able to beat you," he said. "I don't know that I can shoot again, and it's a wonder, I reckon, that my arm wasn't torn off."

He turned toward the exploded gun. The stock was uninjured and the lock mechanism, but the muzzle end of the right barrel was split open and a section blown out of it.

"You didn't get mud or anything of that kind in the

muzzle?" Merriwell questioned, anxiously examining the ruined weapon. "That will sometimes make a gun explode."

"None whatever!" Badger grumbled, nursing his numbed hand and arm, while a crowd gathered round him and Merriwell, asking excited and eager questions. "Do you think I'm fool enough to do a thing like that?"

Frank plucked at Rattleton's arm.

"Take charge of that box of shells," he said, in an undertone. "Don't let any one touch them. The box from which I took the shells for Badger! I'm afraid the shells in it have been tampered with."

"Agnew!" Rattleton gasped. "He's somewhere on the grounds, you know, and he was right up here awhile ago!"

"I don't know. It may be. We can tell better later. Just now, take charge of that box. No more shells must be used out of it, nor out of any others of mine."

"All right!" Rattleton promised, and moved quickly away.

"How is your hand and arm?" Merriwell asked, again addressing Badger.

"Well, I allow it's good enough to do some more shooting!" Badger snarled, giving Hodge a suspicious glance. "You didn't beat me! I missed that bird; but the gun blew up was the reason. I'll shoot you those two, yet; but I'd rather try you ten birds straight—ten

double rises, just the kind we were shooting at. I reckon we'd better settle this thing square!"

There was something very unpleasant in his tone and manner. Hodge saw the glance, heard the words, and could hardly resist the temptation to walk up and knock him down.

"The scoundrel!" he hissed to Browning. "What is he driving at? Does he mean that Merry hasn't given him a fair deal, or that he had the gun explode in some way to keep from being tied by him, or beaten? Perhaps he is hinting crooked work against me! If he does, I'll punch his head, sure. Frank is a fool to stand such stuff."

Merriwell showed a slight trace of annoyance. He took Badger by the arm and they walked aside together. A dozen men were examining the gun, and a score more were craning their necks to get a look at it, while all sorts of excited conjectures and comments filled the air.

"See here, Badger," said Merriwell, somewhat sternly. "You think Hodge may be responsible for that accident. He isn't—no more than I am! You either had mud in the gun——"

"Or something was the matter with the shells!"

"Exactly. That is what I was going to say, if you had let me finish the sentence. No more shells will be used out of that box. They may have been tampered with, but not by Hodge. I know Hodge! He wouldn't do such a thing."

"I reckon that he is none too good for that, if he had a chance!"

"Hodge is my friend."

"I don't care if he is your friend a dozen times over. That might have killed me, or crippled me for life!"

"If those shells were tampered with, it was done for my benefit, Badger, and not for yours. Hodge wouldn't put in shells that would endanger me. I gave you those shells out of my own box."

"And Hodge was talking to you, and knew what you meant to do. He could have juggled a fixed-up shell on you."

"We won't talk about it!" said Merriwell, turning away.

"I've a right to think what I please," Badger grumbled, following him. "He thinks you can beat me shooting. He was afraid I would. I can beat you, and I'd like to do it, to spite Bart Hodge."

"I don't think you are in any condition to do more shooting."

"Oh, I'm all right!" Badger rather snappishly declared, his heart hot against Hodge. "Don't let anything of that kind worry you, Merriwell I want to shoot at ten double rises against you—ten double rises at unknown angles. You've declared that you haven't tried to shoot. I dare you to give me this trial. The numbness is going out of my arm, and it will soon be all right. And I warn you not to throw away any shots!"

They were near the excited crowd.

"All right, Buckrum!" Merriwell answered. "I'll try you, if you're so anxious!"

"We'll buy shells here. And that gun——"

"Perhaps you think there was something the matter with the gun?"

"Oh, I'll buy you another gun!" growled Badger.

Frank flushed.

"The impudence of the fellow!" grunted Browning, who overheard the remark. Hodge, who was standing near Browning, heard it, too.

"I wish you'd hit him, Merry!" he panted.

"No doubt you'd like to do that," said Badger. "But I'd advise you not to try."

"Mr. Badger and I are going to shoot at ten double birds," said Frank, pretending not to notice these things. "I will use your gun, Bart."

"And Badger may use mine," said a sophomore, who was one of Badger's friends, and had been one of Merriwell's enemies. "But for goodness sake, don't use any more dynamite shells!"

Merriwell saw that Morton Agnew had come up and was looking earnestly at Badger and at the ruined gun.

"I wonder that Badger doesn't remember that you slipped a 'fixed' cartridge into a gun for him once," was Frank's thought. "You are at the bottom of this, and your villainy has gone far enough. When I come to strike you I shall strike hard!"

The shattered gun still furnished attraction for many, and Agnew pushed forward to get a close look at it, and to ask questions. Rattleton came up to Merriwell with the box of loaded shells.

"They are not all just alike, Merry!" he declared. "I have been looking them over. See!"

He took up three of the shells and exhibited them to Frank. A casual glance would show no difference between them and the other shells in the box. But a close inspection showed that the brass did not go up quite so high on the paper.

"I am sure that all the shells in the box were just alike," said Merry. "Those were slipped in there. Keep them safe."

"But what if they blow me up?" Rattleton gasped. "I'm afraid of the things. Some of the fellows are saying there was dynamite in the shell that tore up the gun!"

"There is no danger, I think. Take care of them, and see that the other boxes are not tampered with. Watch Morton Agnew."

"Let your bife I'll watch him! And he has been watching me! I caught him at it awhile ago!"

"I think Agnew fixed up some shells to kill or maim me," said Frank. "No doubt he would give a great deal to get the unused ones away. Look out for him."

Then Merriwell went back to the crowd, where Badger

was exhibiting his benumbed arm and hand, and explaining how it felt to have a gun burst in one's fingers.

"Are you ready?" he asked. "I am."

"Yes," Frank answered.

It was strange how the fellows on the shooting-grounds ranged themselves into two companies—the supporters of Merriwell in one knot and the supporters of the Kansan in the other. It was as if an invisible hand had gone through the crowd and separated Merriwell's friends from his foes. About Badger gathered Walter Gordan, Bertrand Defarge, Morton Agnew, Gil Cowles, Mat Mullen, Lib Benson, Newt Billings, Chan Webb, and more of the same sort, a number of them now Merriwell's pretended friends, but all at heart his enemies. While about Merriwell swarmed his friends tried and true, with Hodge, Browning, Diamond, Rattleton, Gamp, Bink, and Dismal close to his person.

"Don't monkey with him," urged Bart, as Merriwell sent Danny and Bink away for some shells and began to wipe out Bart's gun in readiness for the shooting-contest. "Don't throw away any shots. Show those cads what you can do. A lot of them are beginning to think that Badger is really a better man than you are. If he defeats you——"

"He'll never defeat Merriwell!" asserted Rattleton. "Come off the dump!"

"Of course he can't!" added Diamond.

"There are no dead-sure things," droned Dismal. "I've

been enticed into squandering good dollars on several dead-sure things. I've got more sense and less dollars."

"Wait and see!" sputtered Rattleton.

"Who is to shoot first?" Badger asked, walking toward Merriwell's crowd.

Badger had noticed the character of the fellows who had gathered round him, and he was nettled. On the outskirts he even saw the face of Donald Pike—once his friend, now hated by him as a foe.

"Suit yourself," Merriwell answered.

"We'll flip a coin," said Badger.

One of the sophomores drew out a half-dollar and twirled it in the air.

"I'll take heads!" said Merry.

But the head of the coin fell downward, and Badger, taking the gun given him, walked out to the line and faced the traps.

"We will have no signaling," he said, turning round and facing Merriwell's crowd. "As we step up here, let the traps be sprung, and we'll shoot at the birds, whether ready or not."

He was supremely confident in his own abilities.

"All right. Any way to suit you. Go ahead!"

Before Badger could turn back, he heard the sound made by the traps springing. Two birds shot out, one toward the right and the other straight away.

Bang! bang! Badger wheeled and fired quickly, and

made a clean kill of both birds. There was a skirmish fire of clapping hands in the circle of his admirers.

"Fine work!" Merriwell admitted, as he stepped into place with Bart's gun.

He stood with his gun down until the birds were hurled from the traps, then, with a couple of quick snap-shots, smashed them to pieces.

"Whoop-e-ee-ee!" squealed Danny Griswold, turning a handspring. "This soft snap can shoot a little!"

Again the Westerner made a clean kill of two birds. Frank followed him and did the same.

Five times more the Kansan did this, and Merriwell duplicated the performance. The antagonistic crowds ceased to whoop and shout their exclamations of pleasure. The thing was becoming interesting. It began to seem that Badger and Merriwell would again tie. Then Badger, becoming overconfident, missed a bird. He stepped back, with a look of chagrin on his face.

Frank stepped forward, pitched up his gun as the birds were thrown—and missed one! Merriwell missed with the left barrel of his gun, and Badger had missed with the left barrel.

"Now you're monkeying!" Hodge grumbled, as Merriwell retired into the circle of his friends. "Don't do it, Merry! What did you do that for? You could have made the whole string straight, without a single goose-egg!"

Badger's dark, heavy face was flushed as he advanced

again into position. He felt, like Hodge, that Merriwell had purposely missed that second bird, and it annoyed and angered him. This was the worst possible thing that could have happened to him, for when he fired he again missed a bird.

"Don't imitate him again!" Hodge implored.

And Merriwell did not. He made a clean kill of both birds.

"Only two more birds apiece, and Merry one ahead!" squealed Bink, vainly tiptoeing to see as well as those who were taller.

"You want to see Merry do him up?" said Bruce. "You little runt, I'll take pity on you!"

"Me, too!" squeaked Danny.

With little apparent exertion of strength, Browning hoisted the little fellows to his shoulders, thus elevating them above the heads of others, where they sat in great glee, squealing and laughing, Danny on the young giant's right shoulder and Bink on his left, as Badger walked out to shoot at his last two birds.

Again the Westerner killed his birds.

"Now, if Merry misses one, it will be another tie!" grunted Bart.

"Stop hawking through your tat—I mean—— Oh, I don't know what I mean! But just keep still!" Rattleton almost breathlessly begged. "Merry is all right!"

And Rattleton's confidence was justified. Merry fired, with the same result.

"Pulverized 'em!" howled Bink.

"Smashed 'em into bug-dust!" squealed Danny.

"Bub-bub-beat Badger again!" sputtered Gamp.

A cheer of gratification went up from the circle of Frank's friends. Merriwell motioned to Rattleton to bring him some shells.

"Bring me Danny's gun, too!" he called; and Harry ran out to him with a box of shells that he knew were reliable and with Griswold's repeating shotgun.

"All three traps at once!" said Merriwell to the trap manipulators.

Three birds flew at the same moment of time.

Bang! bang! bang!

Badger in his best shooting at two birds had never made cleaner kills. The clay birds seemed to vanish in puffs of dust at the crack of the gun. Merriwell put down Danny's repeater, and took up Bart's gun.

"Three birds again!" he commanded, as he dropped in the two shells and closed the breech with a click.

Almost before the words were out of his mouth, the birds were thrown.

Bang! bang! bang!

He killed the left and center birds with the two loads in the gun; then reloaded and killed the third bird before it could touch the ground!

Badger's face grew redder. There was a wild clapping of hands, joined in by many who were in Badger's crowd.

"Whoop-ee-e-ee!" squealed Danny, wildly waving his cap. "Who says we can't shoot?"

They had been shooting at a rise of twenty-five yards. Merriwell stepped back five yards, thus increasing the distance to thirty. He loaded his gun and held an extra shell in his left hand. Then he turned his back on the traps.

"Pull when you want to?" he called.

The manipulators of the traps seemed to desire to test him. There was an exasperating delay and some questions; then the traps were sprung with startling suddenness.

Merriwell's quick ear was alert. He wheeled as if on a pivot, killed the left bird and the right one. Then dropped in another shell with a slowness that set Bart Hodge wild, and killed the third bird, which had gone off at a difficult tangent, at a distance of at least sixty yards!

"Come on!" grated Defarge, almost beside himself with anger and disappointment. "The devil can't beat him! Let's get out of here!"

"Right!" said Pike, also turning wrathfully away. Badger seemed turned to a statue.

Then again the unexpected happened. A sophomore, who was known to be an intimate friend of Morton Agnew, by seeming accident fired off a gun with which he had been monkeying. Agnew, who had, unnoticed, wormed his way into Merriwell's crowd during the ex-

citement of the shooting-contest, fell to the ground with a cry, as if shot, knocking Harry Rattleton over as he did so.

The shells which Harry had been so carefully guarding were scattered on the ground, and seemed likely to be stepped on and lost in the excitement that followed.

Agnew flounced and threshed about, crying out that he was shot. He was anxiously lifted up, and on his face was seen a drop of blood, which had come from a cut recently made.

"One shot went in right there!" he cried. "I think there are others! Get me into a carriage quick!"

A half-dozen young fellows ran for the nearest carriage, toward which Agnew was conducted as rapidly as possible. Harry Rattleton seemed dazed, and began to look about on the ground as the crowd thinned out there. Merriwell hurried to him.

"What's the matter?" he anxiously asked.

"The shells were knocked out of my hands!" gasped Rattleton. "And not half of them seem to be here!"

Merriwell's look became anxious. He stooped down with Harry and began to gather up the shells.

"A shrewd trick, but it didn't work!" he exclaimed, holding up a cartridge. "Here is one of those that were fixed for me, anyway. And now I know that Agnew did it, and that he intended to kill me!"

The other shells which Agnew had prepared were gone, having been gathered up in the midst of the tumult and

excitement and cleverly slipped by Agnew into his pockets.

"Who fired that shot?" Merriwell asked.

"I don't know!"

Others were gathering round.

"He tried to kill me, Harry, and I shall strike back. And when I strike I shall strike in a way to make the stroke felt!"

CHAPTER XI.

FRANK PREVENTS TROUBLE.

Badger's belief that Hodge had juggled the shell which exploded in the gun was not very strong when he left the grounds of the gun club, but his hatred of Hodge was not in any degree lessened thereby. Only by a supreme exercise of will-power had he been able to keep himself from rushing upon Bart when the latter made his bitter comments to Merry.

"Merriwell is all right, but Hodge isn't even a piece of a man!" he growled, as he made his way home, his thoughts in a chaotic state. "I shall have to punch his head for him. Merry wouldn't have beat me shooting if I had taken my own gun along! I reckon I was a fool for going into the thing. Hodge isn't any too good to slip that shell in on Merry! And if he didn't do it, who did? And I'd like to know what was in it? That's whatever!"

Bart's feelings against the Westerner were quite as bitter. He almost hated the ground on which Badger's shadow fell. It seemed unlikely that Frank could ever reconcile these two antagonistic characters.

Bart was sore also about the way Frank's friends were treating him. Nor was the feeling lessened by his own inner conviction that he had dealt rather shabbily with

one who had been as true a friend to him as Merry had been, and that the other members of the "flock" had good grounds for looking on him with disfavor.

"I shall never crawl on my knees for the friendship and good-will of any of them!" was his thought, as he turned a corner on his way to the lighted campus, on the evening of the second day after the shooting. "And as for Badger——"

He ran violently against a man and was hurled backward. The man was Badger.

"What do you mean by that?" the Westerner demanded, for he, also, had been almost knocked from his feet, and he, too, had been feeding his hot anger with inflammatory thoughts against Bart. "You did that on purpose!"

Hodge lunged at the Kansan's face. But the blow did not fall. The fist was knocked down, and a strong grasp on his shoulder turned him half-round.

"Stop this!" came sternly from Frank Merriwell, who was also on his way to the campus.

"Let me get at him!" Bart panted, trying to wrench away. "He ran into me and tried to knock me down just now. I can't stand it! I won't stand it!"

"Oh, let him come on!" the Westerner grated. "I've been aching for a crack at him for a month! I'll polish him off in short order, if you will just let him come on! He thinks because he knocked me out once that he can do it again!"

"If you fellows are determined to fight, I'll arrange for you to get at each other some time, but you are not going to fight here, and that is flat!"

"Oh, well, let it go!" said Bart, with intense bitterness and disgust. "I'll not trouble him here. But if we ever do come up against each other, I'll hammer the life out of him!"

"I don't doubt you'd kill me if you could!" the Kansan sneered. "I rather think you tried it the other day."

"What do you mean?" Bart demanded, again bristling. "Do you mean the shell that blew up the gun?"

"It's strange you can guess so easy!" Badger insinuated.

"See here, Badger," said Frank, who had stepped between the belligerents. "You insult me when you intimate that Bart knew anything about that shell. That shell was slipped into my box by Morton Agnew. I have discovered enough already to convince me of that. I saw him do something to-day, too, which puts a big club into my hand!"

Badger's face changed, but he would not admit that he might be wrong in laying the dastardly deed at the door of Bart Hodge.

"When you've got the proof, I'll look at it," he doubtingly remarked, turning about.

"Oh, don't talk to him!" Hodge growled. "I wouldn't waste words on him."

"I'll hammer your face for this some day!" Badger panted, turning back.

"It's right here, ready for the hammering whenever you get ready to try it!" Hodge snapped, and then moved away with Merriwell. Seeing that they were heading toward the campus, the Westerner went now in a different direction.

"I don't know why I should let Merriwell come in and interfere in that way," he grumbled. "I allow that it really was none of his affair. But I permitted him to order me to stand back, and I stood back. Of course, I'm under obligations to him, and all that, and he said good words to Winnie for me when I seemed to need them—but, hang it all! he isn't my boss! Who made him my master? It's all right for him to lead Hodge around by the nose that way, but——"

"Hello!" came in an inquiring voice, and Badger, looking up, saw Morton Agnew. The Westerner's face took on an unpleasant look, and he did not answer the hail.

"Don't be surly!" said Agnew, coming boldly on.

"What do you want?" snapped the Kansan.

Then the thought came to him that it would be a good idea to treat Agnew with some consideration, for thereby it might be possible to get the inside facts about the shell that ripped the gun open and came so near mangling his arm.

"What do you want?" he asked again, toning down his gruffness.

"I know we're not friends," said Agnew, with the suavity of a confidence man, "but that is no reason why we should always remain foes. I saw you here, and you looked lonesome. I'm a rather lonesome bird myself to-night, so I whistled to you."

"I allow you've the most gall of any man I ever saw!" was Badger's thought.

Aloud, he said:

"We'll go down this way, then. Did I look lonesome? Well, I wasn't feeling any lonesome, I can tell you—none whatever!"

"Perhaps you object to my company?" drawing back.

Badger knew that this was a piece of acting, and he wanted to crack Agnew on the jaw for it. But he held himself in check. Really Badger seemed to be gaining some self-control—a thing that was entirely foreign to him when he first knew Merriwell. He was enabled to hold himself in by the intense desire he felt to discover if Agnew slipped the "fixed" shell into the box. That was an important point just then.

"Come along!" the Westerner grunted. "You said that you were lonesome, if I am not. I'm not so hoggish as to want to run away from a man who thinks he can get good out of my company."

"I like to hear you talk that way," said Agnew, linking his arm in the Kansan's.

The touch made Badger's flesh creep, but he held this feeling in check, too.

'Here's a saloon!" said Agnew, after they had walked a considerable distance without saying anything of moment. "Let's go in. We can talk in there. I never like to chatter much on the street."

Looking up, Badger saw that they were in front of a well-known resort, which he had entered more than once, but of which he had recently fought shy. Winnie's face rose reproachfully before him as he stopped and looked at the entrance. It almost drove him back.

"We can talk better inside," Agnew urged.

The Westerner glanced hesitatingly up and down the street.

"All right," he agreed, again feeling a fierce desire to get at whatever knowledge Agnew possessed about the exploding shell.

The proprietor nodded familiarly toward him as he walked in.

"Glad to see you. Nice evening!"

Badger, who was not good at acting what he did not feel, mumbled a reply.

"Have something?" suggested Morton, moving up to the bar.

Badger pushed Agnew's arm away and turned toward a side room.

"No! I don't need a drink to talk."

"It greases a fellow's tongue," said Morton, with one of his persuasive smiles. "You won't have anything?" as a waiter appeared.

"Not to-night."

"Some whisky," said Agnew, and the waiter went away, returning shortly with a bottle and some glasses.

"Some cards!" said Agnew, and the waiter brought two unopened packs.

The Westerner's brow grew black. He fancied he saw through Agnew's little game. He believed that Agnew, who was a card-sharp, hoped to get him to talking, then to drinking, and finally into a game, and fleece him out of what money he had. Agnew's funds were low, and he was probably ready for any expedient.

"We can talk better over a game," Agnew urged, deftly opening a pack.

The Kansan pushed back. His blood was boiling. He could hold in no longer.

"I allow you're a big fool, Agnew, if you think you can do me up in that way!" he hotly declared. "I've been told that you tried to kill me the other day. Do you want to rob me, because you failed in that?"

Agnew grew white.

"What are you talking about?" he gasped. "Tried to kill you? What nonsense is that? I don't know what you mean."

However, there was a certain tell-tale shrinking in his manner which Badger could not fail to notice. It convinced the Westerner that Merriwell was on the right track, and his anger burned into deep rage.

"I can see from your manner that you did. Agnew, you've got the heart of a wolf! That's whatever!"

Agnew was truly playing a game, but it was not a card-game. He had learned to hate Badger. To strike the Westerner pleased him now almost as well as a stroke against Merriwell. He dropped the cards and pushed back, as if he feared the Kansan would leap at his throat.

"Wh-what do you mean?" he demanded.

"On the gun-club grounds!" said Badger, rising from the table. "You slipped some dynamite shells into Merriwell's box, and I got one of them. It came near tearing my hand and arm to pieces, and it might have killed me. No thanks to you that it didn't. Your intentions were good enough."

Agnew began to bluster, but in a low tone.

"I'm not used to being accused of such things. How do you know there was anything the matter with the shell? Are you hunting for trouble?"

"That was the trick of an Apache, Agnew!"

"Don't let the proprietor hear you," Agnew begged, and his voice was again as smooth as silk. "What is the use of rowing? I say that I did nothing of the kind, and you're a fool for thinking so. Whoever hinted that to you lied."

"I allow you might as well say that I lied!"

Agnew pushed toward the wall and put his hands into his pockets. Badger, thinking he meant to draw a weapon, gave him no further time, but leaped on him

across the table with the rush of a cyclone. Agnew went down under that rush, but he clutched the Westerner, and began to struggle, at the same time sending up a sharp call for help. In a moment the proprietor and the bartender were on the scene.

"None of this!" cried the proprietor, grabbing Badger by the shoulders, and, with the bartender's assistance, bodily dragging him off the threshing, writhing form of Agnew. Morton did not seem in any hurry to be released or rescued, however, and hung to Badger's coat and vest with the tenacity of the under dog that fails to appreciate the fact that it is overmatched.

"No fighting in here!" panted the proprietor. "This ain't no boxing-club! See! I'm glad to have gents come in and make themselves to home, but I can't allow any fighting!"

Agnew slid toward the door, seeming anxious to escape. The next moment he was out in the barroom, and then he vanished into the street.

"I'll pay for the damages," said Badger, choking down his wrath. "He went to draw a gun on me, and I jumped on him, that's all. A man is a fool to let another get the drop on him, and I allow I don't intend to. You bet I don't. I'll see him again, and when I do I reckon we'll have a settlement."

CHAPTER XII.

AGNEW'S TRICK.

When the Westerner saw Agnew again they were in one of the college lecture-rooms and an examination was in progress. Of course, they did not speak to each other. Badger believed that Agnew had kept away from him since their warlike encounter of the night before. The fact that Agnew was also a sophomore had long been a disturbing thought to the Westerner. Badger had class pride. He sometimes declared that he was a sophomore of the sophomores, but there were a number of sophomores with whom he could not and would not mix.

His seat was now close to the one occupied by Agnew, though somewhat in front of it, and he had the unpleasant feeling that a hole was being bored through the back of his head by Agnew's eyes. When the conductor of the examination looked down that way Badger could not tell whether the professor's gaze was fixed on him or on Agnew. Professor Barton had fiercely penetrating eyes, anyway, and the peculiar manner in which he looked at students in the classroom had always been especially irritating to the Kansan.

Printed questions were used, and Badger found some of them pretty hard.

"I wish Barton wouldn't look me through and

through!" he muttered, noticing again and again that the professor's eyes were fixed on him. "It makes me feel like a cat under the paw of a mouse, or a calf watched by a coyote. I allow there are things pleasanter than Barton's eyes."

But Barton continued to look down that way.

"Is he watching me, or is he watching Agnew?" Badger grumbled, as he dug away at the work cut out for him. "Hanged if I can tell. Perhaps it's just a way he has. Maybe every poor devil in the room is feeling just as I do. Whoever got up these questions must have lain awake of nights trying to see how hard he could make them. I reckon the chances are about two to one that I'll flunk."

In an interval when Barton's attention was turned in another direction, Morton Agnew crumpled a piece of paper, and, with a deft toss, which he made sure was not seen by any one, he threw it beneath Badger's desk. Badger did not know it was there, but the keen eyes of Barton saw it as soon as they were again turned in that direction.

Now, Barton was really not watching Buck Badger, but he was watching Morton Agnew. Slips of the printed questions had been stolen by some member of the sophomore class the day previous, and Agnew was suspected of the theft. That was why the keen eyes of the professor were so constantly turned toward that part of the room. He hoped to discover some evidence of Ag-

new's guilt, if, indeed, Agnew was guilty, as was believed.

When his eyes fell on the piece of paper which Morton had tossed so cleverly beneath Badger's desk, he knew in an instant that it had not been there a moment before. The natural conclusion was, therefore, that the Kansan had dropped it.

Its discovery was very suggestive. He began to watch Badger as well as Agnew. In a little while Badger saw the paper also, and stooped to pick it up.

"I will take that piece of p..per!" came in the calm, even voice of the professor, as the Westerner's fingers closed on the crumpled slip.

Badger, who had intended to open it, wondering what it contained, and vaguely thinking it might be a note which some member of the class had tried to get to him, flushed in a manner to arouse the professor's suspicions. He was almost tempted to tear it open and possess himself of its contents, but Barton was moving toward him, with his eyes glued on the paper.

"I will take that piece of paper," the professor repeated, and Badger reluctantly gave it to him.

Agnew looked down at his work to veil the look of triumph that had come into his face. Badger anxiously watched Barton as he opened the slip and glanced it over.

"That is your handwriting, I believe?" in an ominous voice.

He held it for Badger to read, and, to the Kansan's intense astonishment, he saw that the paper was scribbled over with answers to the questions used in the examination, and that the handwriting seemed to be his own. He was so bewildered he could not say a word. Answers were there to only a part of the questions, however.

There was a strange look on Barton's bearded face. He had seen Badger fishing in his right vest pocket for a stub of a pencil awhile before. He thought, as he remembered this, that it was the left pocket of the vest.

"What is in that left pocket of your vest?" he asked, in a voice that fairly made Badger jump.

Barton believed the slip he held in his fingers had come from that left pocket, and he thought it possible more like it might be concealed there.

"Not a thing!" said the Westerner, the angry flush in his face extending to the roots of his dark hair, for he was not accustomed to being spoken to in that suspicious tone, and it enraged him.

"Will you see if there is not?" Barton asked, striving to maintain his calm, though his suspicions were growing. Badger confidently thrust in his fingers and—drew out a slip of paper like the others, which was also scribbled over with answers to questions!

He could not have regarded it with more surprise and bewilderment if it had been a snake. Barton took it from his shaking fingers, and saw that the handwriting seemed to be the same.

This exciting dialogue was beginning to attract attention, and many eyes were turned in that direction, which made the Kansan get even redder in the face. Badger thrust a hand into one of the upper pockets of his vest and drew out another paper of the same kind.

"What does this mean?" he growled.

He dived frantically into other pockets. He knew that his position was one hard to explain away, but, with a sort of recklessness, he was determined to know if there were more papers of that kind anywhere about him. He could not imagine how they came there, and the rather wild idea occurred to him that he might have scribbled them over that way in his sleep, for the coming examination had disturbed him and made his nights a bit restless.

There were no other incriminating slips.

"I should like to know what it means myself," said Barton.

He looked sternly at Agnew, but the latter had now obtained control of his countenance, and met the professor's suspicious look with an air of innocent confidence. Agnew felt safe. The paper he had crumpled and thrown under Badger's desk was the only one he had secreted about him. So he knew that even if a search was forced, nothing of an incriminating character could be discovered on him.

"I think I have put you in a mighty tight box, Mr. Buck Badger!" was his gloating thought.

And again that look of triumph returned with such force that he could hide it only by lowering his eyes, and did not raise them throughout the rest of the hour.

That evening, while Morton Agnew was amusing himself with a game of solitaire, and chuckling with glee over the clever manner in which he had put Buck Badger in a "box," a rap sounded on the door of his room that made him jump.

"Come in!" he said.

And Frank Merriwell walked in!

Agnew half-rose out of his chair.

"Sit down!" Merriwell urged, closing the door behind him.

Then he turned the key in the lock and dropped the key into his pocket.

"What do you mean by that?" starting to his feet in an agitated way.

"Sit down!" Frank again commanded, in a smooth, quiet tone, which, however, sounded very ominous. Agnew looked toward the closed window, and then dropped limply into the chair.

"It's two stories down, and a hard pavement below that window. I'd advise you, Agnew, not to pitch yourself out of that on your head. It would probably give the undertaker a job."

Agnew pushed the cards about, without knowing what he did, and stared at Merriwell, his face white and his

eyes anxious. He was afraid of Merriwell. Of all the men at Yale, Merriwell was the one he most feared. And his heart told him that there was something serious back of this unexpected call.

"I'm glad to find you in," said Frank, "for I want to have a talk with you. I will take this chair, with your leave. You won't mind if I come to the point at once?"

"I don't know what you're driving at, and I think you must be drunk or luny to come into a fellow's room and lock him in! If you have an idea that there is anything funny about this, I'm pleased to tell you that there isn't."

"I was afraid you might be so uncivil as to desert me. I shall not try to take anything away with me but a bit of your writing. You're a good penman, Agnew, and I shall want a sample, after we've had a friendly chat."

The cold sweat came out on Agnew's brow.

"I don't intend to beat about the bush at all. It is not needed. You know what I think of you, for I've given you abundant opportunity. Twice within my knowledge you have tried to murder me—once when you slipped a ball cartridge into Badger's musket in 'A Mountain Vendetta,' hoping and believing that I would be killed, and again on the grounds of the gun club, when you slipped some prepared shells into my box, thinking I would get hold of one of them, and that I would be killed by the explosion of my gun!"

Agnew's face grew as white as writing-paper. He opened his lips to reply, but Frank went on:

"Of course, you are ready to deny these things. But I have some proofs. You thought you could get all the 'fixed' shells when you knocked Rattleton over in the crowd, pretending you were shot. But one of them you failed to get. I have had its contents analyzed by one of the professors of chemistry, and he says that in place of powder, the shell contained a sort of gun-cotton, and that he does not see why the gun was not torn into splinters."

"This——"

"Just keep still, Agnew, until I am through! I have found the dealer of whom you purchased those shells, and I have found the dealer of whom you procured that gun-cotton!"

Again Agnew opened his mouth to protest. He had stopped pushing the cards about.

"Once you tried to ruin my right arm by injecting into it a preparation that would produce atrophy of the muscles. I can produce evidence of that, too!"

"It's a lie!" Agnew finally gasped. "There is not a word of truth in these accusations!"

"I have been accumulating evidence against you for some time. You have struck at me and at my friends time and again. It is my time to strike now, and I shall strike hard."

The dangerous smile which friends and enemies alike

had come to know so well rested on Merriwell's face. Agnew had seen it there before, and the sight of it made him shiver.

"Badger used that shell—or one of the shells, and only chance saved him from being killed or maimed for life. Not satisfied with that, you struck at him to-day again."

"You're crazy, Merriwell! There is not a word of truth in any of these things. You have fancied them all, and, because you do not like me, you are determined to ruin me."

"You have ruined yourself, Agnew. I have given you chance after chance to reform and change about. You get worse. You are a disgrace to humanity, to say nothing of Yale College. You struck at Badger to-day, as I said.

"I know all about it. Professor Barton fancies that he caught Badger cribbing in to-day's examination. The matter has already gone to the faculty. Badger will go out of Yale as sure as the sun rises if things are permitted to go on. I propose to see that they do not go on. No scoundrel like you, Agnew, shall treat a friend of mine in that way."

"So he has become your friend, has he?"

"No man shall treat one of my foes in that way, if I can help it!"

Agnew attempted a skeptical sneer, but it was a failure. He was shaking like a chilled and nervous dog.

"I have had a talk with Badger. He couldn't understand how the papers got into his pockets. But I knew as soon as he told me of your encounter in that saloon last night, for I had seen the slips purporting to be in his handwriting, and I knew they were forged, and I was sure you were the forger!"

"Quite a Sherlock Holmes!" said Agnew. "This is a very interesting little romance. The only trouble is that, like most romances, there isn't a word of truth in it."

"You are the man who stole the printed question slips. You wanted them for your own use, so that you might not fail in this examination. When you knew what they were, and had prepared answers, you planned to use them to throw Badger down, hoping that if the theft of the slips were discovered the blow would fall on Badger."

"You're away off, Merriwell!"

But Frank went remorselessly on:

"Last night, in the saloon, during that fight, which was of your own seeking, you contrived to put those forged answers, in imitation of Badger's handwriting, into his pockets, where Professor Barton found them to-day. You are a forger, Agnew, and you have lately been passing counterfeit money!"

"Not a word of truth in any of this!" Agnew shakily declared.

"Some of these things I might find difficulty in proving, though I am as sure of them as that you are sitting there. But of other things I have the proof. Now, I am going

to give you your choice: Write at my dictation a confession that will clear Badger of the charge of stealing the question slips and using those answers, or I shall take steps at once which will land you in the penitentiary!"

Agnew grew sick and blind.

"I can't do what you say!" he begged. "My God, Merriwell, even if the things were true—which I deny—I couldn't do it! It would disgrace me forever!"

"The faculty and professors are not anxious to bring odium on the good name of Yale. Your confession, I am sure, will not be made public. You ought to have thought of the disgrace when you were doing those dastardly, cowardly things! It is too late now."

"But I can't!" Agnew wailed. He had ceased to deny his guilt.

"All right!" said Frank, his lips tightening firmly. "I shall clear Badger without this. I wanted to give you a last chance. I, too, am anxious that the good name of Yale shall not be smirched by publishing to the world the downfall and disgrace of a Yale student. But I shall not withhold my hand longer."

He pushed back his chair, and the look on his face was so terrible that it robbed the trembling wretch of his fictitious courage.

"Wait!" begged Agnew. "If I do what you say, you'll give me time to get out of town?"

"I shall not move against you at all. I shall simply

turn the confession over to the faculty, and so clear Badger."

Again Agnew hesitated.

"Here are paper and ink on your table!"

The sweat was standing in drops on the brow of the card-sharp.

"I'll do it simply because I must!" he doggedly declared. "It is an outrage. I do not admit any of these other charges, but I did put those things in Badger's pockets, and I took the questions to help me out in the examination. Those are the only things I am willing to confess."

"They are all I ask you to confess."

With trembling fingers, Agnew drew pen and paper toward him. And then, at Merriwell's dictation, he wrote a complete confession of the wrong he had done Badger.

"That is all right!" Merry admitted, when he had looked it over.

He arose from the chair, folded the paper, and put it in a pocket.

"Get out of New Haven as quick as you can. I shall give this to the faculty in the morning. Good-by!"

He unlocked the door, with his face turned toward Agnew, let himself into the hall, and was gone.

Forbearance and mercy had ceased to be a virtue, and Frank Merriwell's hand was lifted to strike and crush a dastardly foe.

CHAPTER XIII.

COWARDICE OF THE CHICKERING SET.

Merriwell encountered Hodge in the campus, informed him of what he had done, and together they started down-town. By and by they took a street-car, and, getting out at a familiar corner, found themselves in front of a group of Merriwell's friends.

"Excuse me if I walk on!" said Bart.

"No, you are going with me!"

"My room is preferred to my company with those fellows!"

They had not yet been seen by Merry's friends, who were grouped on the sidewalk about Jack Ready, who was talking and gesticulating in his inimitable way.

"Now don't get sulky, Bart!" Frank commanded. "Those fellows are my friends."

"They don't like me. I've seen it, Merry. When I think of some things they have said, it makes me hot even against you."

"Do you want to turn me against you, Bart? That is a good way to do it."

"I don't care! I shall never snivel round those fellows!" Bart snarled. "I'm your friend, Merry! That's enough, isn't it?"

"You take a poor way to show your friendship, Hodge!

You vex me sometimes. Now, look here! The 'flock' can be together but a little while longer. The last of June is approaching fast, and that brings commencement. Diamond, Rattleton, Browning, Gamp, Dismal, Danny, Bink, and a lot more will leave Yale forever in June."

The reflection touched Bart's fiery heart.

"All right," he said. "Go ahead!" and walked after Merriwell.

Willis Paulding, the Anglomaniac, passed them, going in the direction of the large hotel across the way.

"Mud on the bloon—I mean blood on the moon!" exclaimed Rattleton, as Bart and Merry came up.

"What's up?" Frank asked.

"Paulding and the Chickering set are up—there!" said Danny, pointing to some upper windows of the hotel. "They are having a big feed to-night."

"Drinking tea and smoking cigarettes," explained Bruce.

"I've invited every fellow here to attend that banquet with me," Ready jovially declared. "But not a soul will accept the invitation. They fancy their heads aren't hard enough for that kind of drinking!"

"Bub-bub-better get an invitation yourself fuf-first!" Gamp stuttered.

"Oh, I circulate everywhere, like first-class currency. Want to go up and take a peep with me, Merriwell? I'd give a V any time to hear one of those fellows respond



Hodge lifted Merry's unconscious form and faced the fire.
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to a toast! Come along. What d'ye say? I'll be the pilot."

But Merriwell was no more in the mood for such an escapade than the other members of the "flock." Thereupon, Ready skipped across the street himself and disappeared within the hotel.

Merriwell and his friends walked down the street, and in the course of half an hour returned to that corner. Then they saw Ready at one of the upper windows, looking down at them. He had a big piece of cake in one hand and a glass of wine or tea in the other.

"Come up to the feast!" he bellowed. "Great fun!"

But Merriwell had his eyes fixed elsewhere. Suddenly, he exclaimed:

"That hotel is on fire!" He had observed a tongue of flame leaping from a window.

He started across the street, but before he had taken a dozen steps the fire-alarm bell sounded. A few of the people in the hotel seemed to be awaking to the fact that the building was on fire. Merry's friends joined him, and they stood near the center of the street, looking up at the fire and discussing the matter. Then Ready was seen again at the window, staring about in a bewildered way, as if he contemplated leaping to the street below.

"Do you suppose the fire could cut him off so soon?" Merry anxiously queried.

"It doesn't seem likely," Diamond answered. "But,

of course, no one can tell. The Chickering set are up there yet!"

A crowd was collecting, and Merry's friends were thinking of going on across the street, when the arrival of a clanging fire-engine drove them back to the corner from which they had started.

It could now be seen that even in that brief space of time the fire was rapidly spreading. The blaze first seen had increased in size, and flames were now issuing from other windows on that floor. The fire seemed to be in the third story. Luckily, the hotel stood on a corner, away from other buildings.

People were now pouring in a stream from the exits. Merriwell looked again toward the window where Ready had been seen.

"Ready will come right across here as soon as he gets down," he said. "I suppose he is all right, but the fire is on that floor!"

But Ready did not appear. Other fire-engines arrived and began their work. Firemen swarmed everywhere. But the fire increased in intensity in spite of this fight against it. The hotel appeared to have emptied itself of its occupants.

And still Jack Ready did not come. Willis Paulding stumbled across the street, white and shaky. His hair and eyebrows were singed, his Lunnon-made clothes were wet and limp, and he was terribly frightened.

"Merriwell," he gasped, "Jack Ready is up there!"

Merry started. A fear that such might be the case had been growing on him.

"How do you know?" he asked.

Paulding forgot his English drawl in his fright and excitement.

"I saw him!" he admitted. "He was trying to get Lew Veazie down the stairs when he fell. Veazie had been drinking a little, and couldn't help himself."

"And where is Veazie?"

"He is down on the street somewhere."

"And you ran away and left Ready, after he had injured himself while trying to aid you!"

Paulding dropped his head.

"The fire was right on us, and we——"

"Where did he fall?"

"On the center stairway leading from the third story," said Paulding, shivering under Merry's rebuke.

"Fellows, I am going up there after Jack Ready," said Frank calmly.

"You'll go at the risk of your life!" shouted Browning.

But Frank was already half-way across the street. The fire had spread with astonishing rapidity. Some combustible material in the second story had exploded with great force, and this had seemed to scatter the fire. The entire second story was on fire now, as well as the one above it.

Frank vanished in the crowd, which was retreating through fear that the walls were about to fall. Other

fire-engines had come up. The people who fell back from the dangerous vicinity crowded on the Yale men who had looked so anxiously after Merriwell as he hastened to the aid of the imperiled freshman. Willis Paulding, feeling Merriwell's rebuke, and stung by a feeling of his own cowardice, had slipped away.

"I don't like that," Hodge grumbled, looking at the spot where Frank had vanished.

"I've seen things myself that I like better!" grunted Browning.

"You can bet your life that Merry will go wherever a friend is in danger!" said Rattleton.

"Or a foe, either!" added Diamond.

"Fuf-fellows, I'm worried abub bub-bout this!" stuttered Joe Gamp.

"I'd feel easier a good deal if we had all stayed home to-night!" droned Dismal.

For once, neither Danny nor Bink had any comment to offer, funny or otherwise. A feeling that something awful was about to happen stilled their chatter.

Then all started, leaping as if they had been shot at, and pushed back into the retreating and startled crowd. A furnace or something of the kind had given way in the basement with a thunderous report. A great gap showed in one of the walls, and the wall itself seemed on the point of toppling down.

"Sounded like a siege-gun!" chirped a well-known voice. "Fellows, I'm glad I wasn't in there then! Had

the greatest time you ever saw—narrow escape and all that; but here I am again, with my stomach filled with cake and my head intoxicated with tea. All right side up, you see!"

The speaker was Jack Ready!

"Where is Merriwell?" Bart asked.

"Merriwell?" and Ready looked round. "Refuse me, but I supposed he was the center of this intellectual group! Yes, where is Merriwell?"

"He went up there after you—to get you out of the fire!" exclaimed Bink, in great excitement.

"You haven't sus-sus-seen him?" demanded Gamp.

Some firemen planted a ladder against the swaying wall, as if to brace it, and a group came round the corner dragging a huge muddy hose, which they intended to train on another part of the hotel. But, so far, the fire had baffled all their efforts.

"Did he go up there?" Ready gasped.

"Sure!" said Danny. "He is up there now."

Ready's round, red-apple cheeks grew white.

"If he is up there now, he'll never come out!"

Bart stared at the shaking wall and the flaming windows—at the smoke clouds rolling from the doorways. The hotel had become a furnace. Then he stepped out, with a determined look on his dark face. Ready understood the meaning of that look.

"You'll go to your death if you try it!" he declared. "It is hotter than ten ovens, and some timbers fell from

the second floor as I came out. If I hadn't rolled under the stairway when I fell, and thus had protection, I should have been cooked alive."

But if Hodge heard the warning, he did not heed it. He pushed aside Ready's detaining hand and ran quickly across the street. They saw him reach the first smoke-filled doorway, and then he was swallowed up in the smoke. The other members of Merriwell's flock stood still, with shaking limbs and anxiously beating hearts.

"They will both be killed!" gasped Rattleton.

"Sure!" groaned Dismal.

"I don't believe we shall ever see Hodge again!" Ready declared, and his cheeks grew even whiter.

Bruce moved as if he, too, thought of rushing into the flames. Diamond's hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Wait a minute! No use risking any more lives! Bart can do that, if any one can!"

Browning felt that this was true, and fell back with a groan, while a bit of suspicious moisture shone in his eyes. The walls were in such a state that the firemen now began to disconnect the hose and to get the engines away. They warned back the crowd, and policemen began to shout orders and to enforce them with batons.

In the meantime, what was Bart Hodge doing, and what had befallen Frank Merriwell? Hodge was sure that Frank had made his way to the stairway where Willis Paulding had said Jack Ready had fallen. It was the center stairway leading from the third story.

Hodge had not much difficulty in passing through the hotel office, for, after the dash through the doorway, he found the smoke not so dense. It seemed to be sucked into the doorway, and the clerk's desk and vicinity were comparatively free of it. The room was deserted, and there were everywhere evidences of a hasty leave-taking.

Bart ran first to the elevator, thinking he might be able to use that, but the door appeared to be warped, and he could not get it open easily. He did not know whether the elevator was in running condition, and much doubted it, because of the explosion in the basement. Therefore, not wishing to lose any time, he jumped for the nearest stairway, as soon as he felt that no help could be had from the elevator, and climbed as fast as he could toward the second story.

This stairway was filled with smoke, and he felt the heat increase as he ascended, but he still had no trouble, except from the smoke. But when he reached the second floor his heart almost failed. The stairway on which Jack Ready had fallen, and the only stairway Bart could see, was wrapped in flames, which writhed and twined like serpents. The heat, too, was intense.

Bending close to the floor, to escape the smoke and heat as much as possible, Bart groped about, looking everywhere for Merriwell, thinking he might have fallen there. He saw him nowhere, and called loudly. But no sound came back except the roar of the fire. It even drowned all the noises of the street. But not for a mo-

ment did he think of turning back, though he knew how awful the danger would be if he tried to go up that burning stairway. He cast about for some sort of protection. A flimsy curtain of cotton material was stretched across a doorway. This Hodge pulled down and wrapped round his head, protecting his hands with it also as well as he could. Then he measured the stairway and its direction with a quick glance, and made a wild dash for the fire.

He went up the stairway at a run, with his clothes scorching and the protecting cotton cloth bursting into flame. It was a desperate spurt, but Hodge went through the fire, and with a bound threw himself beyond it, and felt, rather than knew, that he was in some kind of hall, where the fire was not so bad. He pulled aside the flaming cloth, pitched it from him, put up his scorching hands to shield his eyes, and looked about.

"Merriwell!"

The cry was one of joy.

"Merriwell!"

This time the exclamation held the tone of fear and dread. Frank Merriwell was lying in this space, which Bart saw now to be a wide corridor. Frank seemed unconscious. He was lying close against the wall, with his arms doubled over his head. Near him was a piece of timber which had fallen from the floor above. Other pieces of timbers seemed about to fall from the same

place. This one, as Bart saw at a glance, had struck Merriwell down.

Bart's heart almost stopped beating when the thought came to him that perhaps Frank was dead. He leaped toward him, with a bound, uttering that cry of "Merriwell!" as he did so.

"Frank! Frank!" he cried. "Frank, are you much hurt?"

The roaring of the fire in the stairway sounded louder than ever. Its noise was like that of a raging furnace. Bart's hands were scorched, but he did not feel the pain of the burns. Another piece of timber dropped from the floor above within a foot of where he stood. Others seemed about to fall. There was fire all round him, and the whole corridor seemed on the point of leaping into flame.

Hodge lifted Merry's unconscious form and faced the fire. A groan came from Merriwell's lips. Bart looked into the white face and saw a bloody lump on the side of Merry's head. That face appealed to him as if for protection from the fire.

In spite of his many faults, Bart Hodge held for Frank Merriwell the love of a strong and manly heart. Frank was the one true and faithful friend who had always stood by him—the one friend who always understood him—the one friend who was every ready to defend him. And Hodge would have laid down his life for Merriwell!

He saw that if he dashed through the fire with Merri-

well, that face, so strong and manly and true, would be horribly disfigured. He did not think of his own so much as of Merriwell's. Yet he felt that if he got out of the building with his burden he would have to make haste. There were doors along the corridor, and he knew that they opened into rooms. He put Merriwell down, and finding the first door locked, kicked it in with his foot.

The room was full of smoke, but the fire had not yet entered it. Hodge hastily tore from the bed a big double blanket, and retreated with it into the corridor. This blanket he wound round Merriwell's face and shoulders and hands; then lifted Frank again, protecting himself with the folds of the blanket as well as he could as he did so. Thus dragging Merriwell, he stumbled toward the hell of fire that roared in the stairway.

There was a jarring sound, and for a moment it seemed that the whole building was tumbling down round his ears. A section of the rear wall had fallen outward, and the part of the hotel containing the kitchen was a burning wreck. Bart hardly heard the sound, so absorbed was he in the task before him. He did not feel Merriwell's weight—in fact, his strength seemed to be as great as Browning's.

"Frank!" he cried, in his heart—"Frank, my dearest friend, if I can't carry you out, we'll die together!"

The fire in the stairway had greatly increased. But Hodge did not hesitate. Wrapping the blanket closer

about Merriwell and himself, he rushed, with seeming recklessness, but with a boldness that was really the highest form of courage, into that raging cauldron of fire, and descended with the steady celerity of one who sees every foot of the way and has no thrill of fear.

The blanket crisped and cracked and smoked into flame as the fiery waves beat against it. Bart seemed to be breathing liquid flame. But the thick bulk of the blanket shielding Merriwell's face and hands kept them from the searing fire.

Half-fainting, but victorious, Bart Hodge reeled out of the hotel, bearing Merriwell in his arms. A great cheer went up from the excited crowd, for, somehow, the information had spread that a daring attempt to rescue a friend was being made by one of the college students.

Merriwell's flock dived through the thick smoke and carried both Hodge and Merriwell to a place of security. And even as they did so the tottering side wall, that had so long been swaying, fell, and the shell of the burning hotel collapsed like a house of cards.

* * * * * * *

The next morning Danny Griswold bounced into Merriwell's room. Hodge was there. He and Frank were talking about the fire and congratulating themselves that neither had received bad burns and that Merry's injury was not serious.

"News!" exclaimed Danny. "Morton Agnew left New Haven last night."

"I knew he would," said Frank. "He knows I am going to give his confession to the faculty this morning, and he would not want to stay here a minute after that. Yale will never see him again."

"Good thing for Yale!" Hodge grunted.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WILD NIGHT.

A wild lot of sophomores and freshmen were celebrating the beginning of "secret-society week," by marching round the campus at night in lock-step style, singing rousing college songs. They danced in and out of the dormitories, wildly cheered every building they passed, while the classes bellowed forth their "Omega Lambda Chi."

Down by the fence by Durfee's, on the campus, in the gymnasium, at Traeger's and Morey's and Jackson's, and wherever Yale men congregated, almost the sole topic of conversation was of who would go to "Bones," "Keys," and "Wolf's Head."

The air of mystery surrounding membership in these senior societies, the honor which their membership confers, and the fact that but a few men, comparatively, out of any junior class can be elected to them, create an absorbing interest.

Skull and Bones, or "Bones," as it is popularly called, is the wealthiest and most respected. Then follows Scrolls and Keys, or "Keys," with Wolf's Head third in order of distinction. The names are taken from the society pins. Each of these societies has a handsome and

costly club-house, whose secrets are no more to be arrived at than are those of the sphinx and the pyramids.

Conjectures as to what society would get the most prominent members of the junior class had engrossed a good deal of thought for several weeks. Each society takes in fifteen members, or forty-five in all, out of the two hundred and fifty or more men that usually compose the junior class. As every junior is anxious to become a member, the feverish interest with which the subject is regarded by the juniors may be imagined. This interest had gradually spread throughout the college. Now the subject suddenly leaped to such importance that it overshadowed the ball-game which Yale was to play against Princeton, and the coming boat-race at New London, in which the phenomenally popular Inza Burrage was to be the mascot of the Yale crew.

Class spirit, that wildly jovial night, seemed to melt the sophomores into a fraternizing, loving brotherhood, where discord was unknown, even though the class contained such opposite elements as Buck Badger, Jim Hooker, Donald Pike, Pink Pooler, the Chickering set, Porter, Cowles, Mullen, Benson, Billings, Webb, and others. Though these might join in class dances and marches, and howl themselves hoarse in honor of the sophomores and of Yale, some of them could no more unite in any true sense than oil and water.

The campus was brilliantly illuminated. Powerful calcium and electric lights bored holes through the dark-

ness, turning night into day. All the windows of all the dormitories which face the campus were crowded with students and with women.

Three of these windows held Frank Merriwell's friends. Frank was there, with Inza, Elsie, and Winnie, together with Mrs. Hodge and Inza's invalid father, Bernard Burrage.

"As in life, the good and the evil mingle," sighed Dismal Jones, as his eyes fell on Jim Hooker and other honorable sophomores who were marching in close proximity to the Chickering set. "The wheat grows up with the tares, and the result is an everlasting bobbery."

"There will be tears in your wardrobe if you don't quit walking on me!" squeaked Bink Stubbs.

"Climb up on a chair," advised Danny, who had already taken his own advice, and was thus able to look down into the campus without stretching his neck until he was in danger of converting himself into a dromedary. "It's just great!"

"Can't be anything great for me that holds that Chickering crowd!" Browning grumbled.

"Isn't the campus beautiful!" was Inza's enthusiastic exclamation.

It was, indeed, beautiful, for the fresh, tender green of the elms was brought out with marvelous distinctness by the brilliant lights.

"They're kuk-kuk-kicking up an awful dud-dud-dud-

dust!" stuttered Gamp, pushing forward for a better view.

"Dust assume to crowd in front of me, base varlet?" questioned Bruce. "I'll forgive you if you'll just take off your tall head and hold it under your arm!"

"I s'pose naow you think that's a joke!" said Gamp.

"It's more than a dust, fellows," said Merriwell. "There is a fight on!"

Certain of the sophomores had bunched together under one of the elms, and seemed to be struggling, as if in a contest.

"It looks as though they might be playing football," suggested Elsie.

Winnie Lee leaned anxiously out of the window, for in the center of that knot she had seen Buck Badger. She had eagerly searched for him in the procession, and had but found him when that indication of a wrangle came to disturb her.

The procession seemed to be breaking up and concentrating beneath and around the elm where that struggle was taking place. Far in front a number of students were bellowing their "Omega Lambda Chi," but the others had ceased to sing.

"See how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" said Dismal.

And Dismal was right. The beginning of that scramble was trivial enough. But the trouble which it kindled was destined to outlive the moment and seriously affect

the life and fortunes of at least one of the participants. Jones was merely grumbling one of his proverbs, without dreaming how appropriate the words really were.

Donald Pike had been nagging and tormenting the Chickering set. He had bumped his toes against Ollie Lord's high-heeled shoes. In the lock-step walk he had put his hands crushingly on Tilton Hull's high choker collar. He had pitched against and torn Gene Skelding's flaring necktie. And he had even dared to knock off Julitan Ives' hat and disarrange his lovely bang.

At last, in his exuberance, he seized a handful of clammy soil that was almost the consistency of mud, and playfully tossed it at Lew Veazie. It missed Veazie, and, by an infortuitous fate, took Buck Badger smack in the eye. Badger, who had seen Pike's antics, clapped a hand to his eye with a grunt of pain and astonishment.

"You scoundrel!" he bellowed. Then he lunged at Pike, with a startling suddenness that took Donald quite off his guard and threw him headlong.

Badger believed that Pike had thrown the mud into his eye purposely. There had been bad feeling between them, and even worse, for some time, and the gap separating them seemed to be growing wider all the while. Each had said exasperating and belittling things of the other, and a wall of hate had been built up where once there had been a bond of strong friendship. The pain in Badger's eye was excruciating, and it rendered him for a little while absolutely reckless. Fortunately, it also

rendered him incapable of inflicting on his former friend the punishment which his rage dictated.

For a short time affairs were exciting enough. Sophomores and freshmen deserted the procession and leaped for the elm where the crowd was quickly gathering. Badger threw himself on Pike, after the latter was down, and would have proceeded to pound his face, without doubt, but that his arms were caught and held.

It was all over within less than two minutes. Some of the Westerner's friends held him back and began to talk some sense into him, while Pike's friends drew him out and away.

"I reckon this isn't the end of it!" snarled Badger, flinging the words at Pike. "There will be a beautiful settlement of this, remember."

Then he hobbled blindly out of the crowd with some acquaintances, to have his smarting eye attended to, while the procession reformed, and the rollicking students began again to shout their "Omega Lambda Chi."

The "beautiful settlement" came at a late hour that night. Badger encountered Pike while the latter was on his way to his room. The Kansan's eye still pained him, and his rage was hot. As soon as he saw Pike he stepped across the walk and took him by the nose.

"That's the way I treat such skunks as you!" he hissed, flinging Pike from him after offering him that deadly insult. "I want to warn you to keep out of my

way after this. If you don't, I'll treat you just as I would a rattler!"

"You mean you will kill me!" snarled Pike, rushing at the Kansan in a fit of blind rage.

But he was no match for Badger, who flung him off with surprising ease, and then held him at bay and at arm's length by a clutch on his throat.

"I've a notion to choke the breath out of you!" said Badger. "Don't tempt me too far, or I might forget myself and do it. You know that I've got a red-hot, cantankerous temper when I get started. Now go! Git! If you don't, I'll lift you with my shoe. And keep out of my way, unless you want trouble!"

He pushed Pike from him with stinging scorn.

"I'll go!" said Pike. "But I'll pay you for to-night's work! See if I don't! You'll find out that there are more ways of fighting than with fists. You may wish that you had killed me, before you get through with it!"

"What does the scoundrel mean by that?" the Westerner questioned, staring at Pike as the latter hurried away. "I reckon he is mean enough to do anything. Well, he had better have a care!"

He was soon destined to feel the effects of Pike's threat in a manner more crushing than any knock-down physical blow which Pike could have delivered.

CHAPTER XV.

PIKE AND BADGER.

The next evening, which was Tuesday evening, while the societies were hilariously enjoying their annual calcium-light procession, Donald Pike took a car and hastened to the home of the Honorable Fairfax Lee. He had tarried in the campus long enough to be sure that Winnie Lee was again enjoying the processional festivities from one of the dormitory windows.

"Nobody will know whether I am in that procession or not," he muttered, as he started toward Lee's. "And if they do know, what is the difference? I'm under no obligation to be there, and I can say that I had a headache, or anything else I want to, if I choose to take the trouble to account for my absence."

To Pike's great satisfaction, he found Fairfax Lee at home; and when he told the servant that he had an important communication to make, he was invited into the waiting-room, and finally was ushered into the presence of Mr. Lee.

The facing of Mr. Lee in this manner, even though he could claim disinterested motives, rather phased even the blunted spirit of Donald Pike. If he had dared to, he would have committed his story to writing, and so brought it to Lee's attention. But things that are writ-

ten often have an unpleasant way of reappearing, to the discomfiture and undoing of the writer, and Pike's caution warned him against such risks. Words merely spoken, he assured himself, can be denied, if that becomes afterward necessary. Written words, undestroyed, cannot be so easily escaped.

"Anything I can do for you?" Mr. Lee queried, when Pike hesitated. "You have a communication, I believe?"

Donald pulled himself together, and the opening sentences of what he intended to say came back to him. He had thought these out with care, and they seemed very fine and even humanitarian.

"I want you to know at the outset, Mr. Lee, that in coming to you with the information I bear I am wholly disinterested. But the truth is due you. No one else seems to have had the courage to tell you, and I shall."

Fairfax Lee began to look interested.

"You are very kind," he said, "and I thank you in advance for your favor."

This was so auspicious a beginning that Pike's courage rose.

"I want to have a frank talk with you about a certain young Yale man—Mr. Buck Badger. You must have noticed that he is very devoted in his attentions to your daughter?"

There was no reply to this, though Pike halted, in the expectation that there would be one.

"I am well acquainted with Badger. In fact, until

very recently, he was my roommate, and we were good friends. Perhaps when I tell you that he is not a fit man to associate with your daughter, you may think I am led by the fact that Badger and I are not now the friends we were once. But it is not so. We are not friends simply because his baseness became so apparent to me that I could no longer associate with him.

"I have thought this thing over for a good while, Mr. Lee, and as an honorable man, I did not think I ought to remain silent and see things go on as they are. You love your daughter, Mr. Lee?"

This last was rather an effective shot, for Fairfax Lee loved Winnie devotedly.

"All this is very unpleasant, Mr. Pike, but I am ready to hear what you have to say. I am free to confess that you rather surprise me."

"Your daughter is an admirable young lady, Mr. Lee. And though I cannot say that she and I are more than the merest acquaintances, I thought it a shame that matters should go on as they are without a word from me to you, to let you see what your daughter is walking into. Or what she would walk into, if she should ever be so unfortunate as to marry Buck Badger!"

Donald Pike had at last contrived to get into his tones and manner a sympathetic element that, while it was veriest hypocricy, was very effective.

"My daughter is not married to Mr. Badger yet!" said

Lee, somewhat bluntly, a frown on his usually pleasant face, for his positon was far from agreeable.

"And I hope she may never be."

"You fail to specify," Lee reminded. "You make only vague charges."

"There are many things," said Pike, coming to the point now with great boldness, "but I shall name only one. Buck Badger is a drunkard."

Fairfax Lee seemed astonished, and the frown on his face deepened.

"He is the worst type of drunkard. Not a man who drinks steadily, but one of those who indulge now and then in crazy, drunken debauches. For weeks, even months, he may not touch a drop of liquor. Then he will go on a spree. You can verify this, I am sure, by inquiries carefully made among the students. More than once he has been known to be on a drunk. He was drunk when he went aboard the excursion steamer, *Crested Foam,* when she was burned in the bay."

"What?"

"It is true, Mr. Lee, every word of it. Your daughter and a good many others think he was drugged by the boat-keeper, Barney Lynn, and lured on the steamer for the purpose of robbery. But when he met Lynn he was already raving blind drunk, and Lynn merely took advantage of his helpless condition. You can know that this is true if you will call or send a man to the saloon of Joe Connelly. He went to Connelly's that night—or

rather, the evening before—filled himself up on the vilest decoctions, and went out from there as drunk as a fool. He has been there before many times. Connelly knows him well."

All this was so circumstantial that Fairfax Lee was alarmed and moved. He knew that Connelly's was one of the worst dens of the city, and he felt sure that unless there was something in the story Pike would not give names in this way. He resolved to learn the whole truth about the matter.

"If what you say is true, Buck Badger is not fit to associate with any girl," he asserted.

"Especially not with a girl as innocent and unsuspecting as your daughter, Mr. Lee. I have seen that for a good while, and it has been a fight with my conscience to keep from coming here with this story. I couldn't delay it longer. I trust you see that I can have no hope of gain, and nothing but right motives in bringing you this story—which you will find fully substantiated by a course of inquiry."

Fairfax Lee was flushed and silent.

"All of Badger's friends, or most of them, I am sure, know that he was drunk, and not drugged, when he went aboard the *Crested Foam*. Some of them might admit this knowledge."

"You are a sophomore?"

"Yes."

"And Mr. Badger is?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were recently his friend and roommate?"

"Yes."

"I have your card, which I will put by for reference. I presume, if I call on you, you will be willing to repeat anywhere what you have said to me here?"

This was unexpected, and Pike hesitated.

"I don't care to get myself into trouble with Badger. He is of the bulldog, pugilistic type, and the first thing he would do would be to assault me like the bully he is. I have given you the warning. You can get all the proof you want. Probably you would never have heard of this until too late, if I had not voluntarily brought you the story."

"You are right," Lee admitted. "Perhaps that would be asking too much."

"I have struck the blow, Badger," Donald Pike muttered, as he left the handsome home of the Lees. "You will find it more of a knock-down, I fancy, than if I had hit you between the eyes with my fist. Nobody ever walks roughshod over Don Pike and gets off without suffering for it. You will hear something drop pretty soon."

And so, chuckling, he took his way to the street-car line, and returned to the campus and the Yale jollification.

The Kansan had accompanied Winnie Lee home that

evening, as usual. The hour was late, and he did not enter the house, but kissed her good-night at the gate.

"Good-night and pleasant dreams, sweetheart!" he said as he turned to go.

His heart was light, for he and Winnie had enjoyed a long and loving talk on the way home, and throughout the evening there had been no untoward incident to mar his pleasure. He had noticed Donald Pike's absence, and had been glad of it, but he merely supposed Pike kept away because of the row of the previous evening. If there are such things as premonitions of coming trouble, certainly they did not distress Badger that night. Winnie was also in a happy frame of mind as she tripped lightly up the steps and entered the house.

Inza and Elsie had returned some time before. As she had expected, they had retired to their rooms. She was surprised, however, to find her father waiting for her in the sitting-room, which was brightly lighted. As she came into the room, she saw something ominous in his face. She thought she was to be lectured for remaining out so late.

"Sit down, Winnie," he said. "I want to have a talk with you."

His voice was even more ominous than his face. She came and sat down by his side, when she had removed her hat. He put his hand on her head and drew her toward him.

"Did Mr. Badger come home with you, Winnie?" he asked, and his voice was slightly tremulous.

"Yes, father. I know I stayed a little late, but it was so hard to get away while so much was going on. I don't know when I have had so pleasant an evening. And besides, it was hard for Buck to get away, and we had arranged for him to come home with me. The festivities had not ended when we left."

"Buck Badger must never come home with you again!" he said, with a firmness and suddenness that took all the color out of her cheeks, and seemed to take all the breath out of her body. She sat still, as if frozen by the statement, while a scared look filled her eyes. Then she partly roused herself.

"What—why do you say that?"

"I have learned that he is not fit to associate with you —is not fit to associate with any girl!"

"What have you heard, father?" she demanded, in a trembling voice. "I know that whatever it is, it isn't true, for Buck is fit to associate with any girl!"

She half-expected him to refer to the fracas of the evening before in the campus.

"If there is one thing on which I am determined, it is that my daughter shall never marry a drunkard!"

"Buck isn't a drunkard!"

"He was drunk when he was taken aboard the *Crested Foam* by that boatman, Barney Lynn."

"No, father!"

"You think not, of course. You think he was drugged."

"He was drugged. Lynn drugged him. He was not drunk, and he had not been drinking. Who has been telling you such things? I am sure it cannot be any one who has any honor."

"It was some one who felt it to be his duty to warn me of the fact that my daughter is in danger of marrying a drunkard. I thank him for it."

"But, father, you would not take the unsupported word of any one, would you? I know that Buck has touched liquor at times, just as nearly all the college men do, but he is not a drunkard, and he is not even a drinking man. And he is now strictly temperate. He told me so himself, that he has taken a pledge with himself never to touch anything of the kind again. And Mr. Merriwell—you know that Mr. Merriwell wouldn't befriend and favor him as he is doing now if Buck were a drunkard."

"But I know, Winnie, dear!" Lee firmly, yet kindly, insisted.

"And I know, father! Barney Lynn confessed to me that he drugged Buck; but he said nothing about Buck being intoxicated, which he would have done, wouldn't he, if Buck had really been intoxicated when he met Lynn?"

The girl was quick and alert. She understood that some desperate attempt to separate her from the man

she loved had been made, and she did not intend that it should succeed without an effort against it on her part.

"Who told you this—lie, father?"

"I wish it was a lie!" Lee groaned.

"It is!"

"I have just come from Connelly's saloon, down in one of the worst parts of the city. I was told to go there and I would find the evidence I wanted. I went; and I have just returned. Badger was at Connelly's the night before the *Crested Foam* excursion. It is an all-night resort—though it professes, I believe, to close at midnight. Badger left there at about two or three o'clock, blindly intoxicated. He was simply reeling drunk. He must have gone from there to the wharf, and there he fell into the hands of Barney Lynn, who drugged him for his money. This is true, Winnie. There isn't the slightest doubt about it. I wish it were all a terrible mistake, but it isn't. And that was not the first time that Badger had reeled out of Connelly's far into the night, drunk. He is given to just such drunken debauches."

Winnie Lee's heart seemed to have turned to lead in her bosom. She was cold from head to feet, except that in her cheeks bright spots burned. Her father looked at her with anguished eyes. He noted the pallor and the hectic spots.

"Winnie, I can't let you throw yourself away on such a fellow as Buck Badger! You must put him out of

your thoughts. He is unworthy of you. I thought he was an honorable young man, and now I find I was mistaken. I shall make further inquiries, but those I have made to-night are enough to condemn him. You must not see him again, and you must have nothing further to do with him. I want you to tell him just what I have said—or I shall tell him myself, and give him a piece of my mind in the bargain."

Winnie knew that she was trembling as with an ague, but she tried to hold her emotions in check that she might fight for herself and for Buck. Everything was at stake now, she felt, for she loved Badger with an absorbing love.

"You have simply been deceived, father," she insisted. "I know it. Like many Yale men, Buck has been a little wild at times. He knows it and acknowledges it. But as for that night and that excursion, that isn't true, I don't care who told you. Buck has a good many enemies, and some of them have come to you with this story. Tell me who told you, in the first place."

"It wouldn't be right just now for me to give his name. And it is not needed. Connelly admitted that Badger had been there often, and had gone from there drunk the night before the steamer excursion. He remembered it, because the story of the fire and of Lynn's death, and the drugging of Badger, was in the papers, and he could not forget the time. I wish it wasn't true, Winnie; but it is true. It will be hard, perhaps, for you to give him

up, but better that than for him to make you unhappy, as he is sure to do."

"Hard!" she mentally cried. "It will kill me!"

He looked at her pathetically, yet with decision and firmness.

"Make up your mind that he is unworthy. I will bring you more proofs, if necessary. But I, first of all, lay on you my commands. You must not see him again, except to tell him that he cannot call again, and that you cannot be anything to each other hereafter but the merest acquaintances."

Man of affairs and of the world as he was, Fairfax Lee had not yet learned that love cannot be made to come and go at will. If the little god is blind, he is also stubborn, and has a way of his own.

"I can't, father!" Winnie begged. "You must not ask it of me."

"What? You would not continue to go with him, knowing what I have told you? You would not permit a drunkard to pay you attentions, or a man who is in the habit of going on wild debauches?"

"No. But Buck is not that kind of a man. You have simply been deceived."

"I have given my orders," said Lee, with a sternness he seldom used in speaking to Winnie. "I expect that they will be obeyed. It is useless to argue the matter. Buck Badger must not come into this house. I will write him a note to that effect, myself. You shall not

see him again! I shall tell him in plain words just what I have learned, and that this house and your company are forbidden to him."

"But, father——"

"We will not talk any more about it. You are stubborn to-night. You will think better of it in the morning. No one—no one, Winnie, loves you as I do! I have given you every advantage. You shall not throw yourself away on any one."

He got up, as if to end the interview.

The room and its belongings seemed swinging wildly round in a crazy dance before the eyes of Winnie Lee. She grasped at her chair for support. She seemed unable to lift herself. In her heart there was only one cry—one wild cry: "Buck! Buck! Buck!"

By a great effort, she at last arose from her chair. Her father saw the marblelike pallor of her face, and, touched by this sign of distress, he came over, put his arms about her and kissed her. Her cheek, against which he pressed his lips, seemed cold as ice.

"Don't be foolish, dear!" he pleaded. "You shouldn't grieve over a man who is so manifestly unworthy of you. You know that I love you, and that I haven't said these things to give you pain, but because it is my duty as your father. Now, good night, dear."

"Good night!" she said, as if in a dream, and blindly walked toward the door.

In her room, she threw herself across her bed.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she moaned. "Buck! Buck! Buck! Who has told such terrible lies on you, dear?"

And so she lay there, moaning out a grief that was too great for tears.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BLOW FALLS.

The next afternoon the Westerner received this note, which was delivered at his room by a boy, who went away before Badger had a chance to question him:

"Mr. Buck Badger: Certain facts have come to my knowledge which show that you are not the man I supposed you to be. I find that you are not only a drinking man, but that you often become grossly intoxicated, and that you were so when lured aboard the *Crested Foam* by Barney Lynn. Under these circumstances, you cannot expect that I will longer permit your attentions to my daughter. I ask you, therefore, not to try to see her again, and not again to call at my house, where you are most unwelcome. If there is any spark of manhood or gentlemanliness left in you, you will respect my wishes and commands in this matter. Yours,

"Fairfax Lee."

The Kansan stared at the paper as if he could not believe his eyes, while a flush of hot displeasure crept into his dark face.

"Who has been telling him that?" he growled, jamming the note down on his table, and then picking it up to read again. "I'll break the neck of the man that did that. 'Not try to see her again?' Well, I don't think!

I allow I shall see her every chance I get, and whenever I choose, and I'd like to tell Lee so. Why, what——"

He got up from the table and began to walk back and forth like a caged tiger. He was sure that some enemy had struck at him in this way. Suddenly he halted, and the pupils of his eyes contracted.

"Ah!" he snarled. "I reckon that was the work of Don Pike. He said he'd strike me in a way that would be worse than if he hit me with his fist, and this is what he meant! Well, I'll settle with you, Pike, for that, and don't you ever forget it! You won't forget, either, I allow, when I'm through with you. That's whatever!"

He crumpled up the note, hastily stuck it into a pocket, jammed his hat on his head, and left his room hurriedly, locking the door. He did not stop in the campus. It was filled with Yale fellows, and the fence in front of Durfee Hall was crowded. He saw here and there men whom he knew well, and who nodded to him. He hardly took time to return the greetings.

"What's the matter with Badger now?" rumbled Browning. "He is charging along like a blind bull at a fence."

"Why do you ever notice what the fellow does at all?" Bart Hodge grumbled.

"Well, even cranks are interesting," said Dismal Jones, also looking curiously after Badger.

"Curiosities likewise," remarked Danny Griswold, puff-

ing at his cigarette. "And since our dear Merry has just about adopted this wild bull from the plain, my interest in him as a curiosity has increased."

"As a guess, I should say he is hunting somebody to fight," said Diamond.

"Then he will be accommodated in mighty short order," Browning prophesied. "I never yet saw a fellow go after trouble and return without finding what he sought. Mr. Badger is not the only fellow who goes pawing round with his hair standing and blood in his eye."

"Speaking from experience, Browning?" mildly inquired Bink Stubbs, scratching a match to light a cigarette. "You have gone in search of trouble a few times, to my knowledge."

"And you're searching for it now!" grunted Browning, giving the little fellow a warning look.

All unaware of the fact that his rapid transit across the campus had occasioned unusual comment, Badger hurried on, and finally entered a car which took him to the office of Fairfax Lee.

"Is Mr. Lee in?" he asked of the clerk in the outer room.

"Yes."

"Will you give him my card, please, and tell him I should like to see him a few minutes?"

The clerk took the card and disappeared. He was back immediately.

"Mr. Lee says that he cannot see you, sir!"

"Did he say that he is engaged?"

"No, sir. He does not care to see you!"

The Westerner's dark face burned, and he bit his lip to keep the hot words from rushing out in a torrent. He stood for a moment, hesitating. But a door separated him, he believed, from Mr. Lee. He was almost ready to push open that door and confront Lee and demand an explanation of the letter forbidding him to see Winnie again. But he got the better of himself, and walked out of the office.

"If he thinks he can bluff me out, or freeze me out, he don't know me!" he grated, as he turned away. "I shall see Winnie as often as I can. Hanged if I don't go up there right now!"

With the Kansan, to think was to act. And in a few minutes he was in another car speeding toward the home of the Lees.

"If I don't get to see her, perhaps I can find out something about this mess from Inza or Elsie. They may be able to clear away the mystery. I allow I never was in so horrible a snarl in my life. But I'll punch Pike's head for this, and don't you forget it! That's whatever!"

But the Westerner met quite as chilling a reception at Lee's home as at the office. The servant who met him at the door had received her instructions.

"You are not to be admitted to the house," she said sharply.

"Is Miss Lee in?" he persisted.

"No."

"Is that true, or is it one of the society lies which declares that a lady is out when she is in?" he bluntly demanded.

To this there was no answer. The servant began to close the door. Badger stopped this by taking hold of the knob.

"What do you want?" asked the girl, who was somewhat frightened by the Westerner's violent manner.

"I want to see Miss Winnie Lee."

"She is not at home."

"Then I want to see Miss Inza Burrage."

"She is not in."

"Then I should like to see Miss Elsie Bellwood."

"She is not in."

Badger suddenly changed his tactics. Bluster would not do, he saw. He put his hand into a pocket and drew out a five-dollar note, which he held up alluringly.

"If you will take a note for me to Miss Lee, I will give you this five dollars."

The servant shook her head and again tried to close the door.

"If you will take a note to either Miss Burrage or Miss Bellwood, I will give you the five dollars."

Once more the servant sought to close the door.

"I have my orders, Mr. Badger. I cannot afford to lose my place for five dollars or fifty dollars. And I wouldn't do what you ask, anyway. If you do not let me close the door, I shall call for help."

"All right!" said Badger gruffly, releasing the door. "But I will see those young ladies, just the same."

To accomplish this he remained in the vicinity of the house until long after nightfall. But he was wholly unrewarded for his vigil, and at last, distressed, humiliated, and angry, he took a car for the college grounds, raging like a lion against Donald Pike. Even an enemy of Badger must have pitied him that night.

The campus was filled with Yale men and their friends, and there were excitement and sport, fun and laughter, music and merriment galore. But Badger could enjoy none of it. He had no thought for anything but Winnie Lee and the treatment he had received from her father. He wondered if she were at home, and was half of the opinion that Lee had spirited her out of the city. His disappointment in not seeing either Elsie or Inza was bitter, for somehow he felt that if he could see them they would be willing to help him.

With this feeling, he now began to look for Merriwell and his friends, but they were not to be found. He went to Merry's room, and then from room to room, even venturing finally to knock on Hodge's door. Later he learned that Hodge and Merry had called at the home of Fairfax Lee, after he had given over his vigil, and had

been cordially admitted, and had accompanied Inza and Elsie to a banquet, which was attended by the whole Merriwell set.

The Westerner was more successful in his search for Merriwell the next day, though he did not get a chance to speak to Frank until the afternoon.

Badger was looking haggard and distressed as he came up to Merry. They were in the campus, and Yale's famous "slapping" ceremony was soon to begin. The campus was filling with men, and the members of the junior class were out in full force, for out of that junior class, by the "slapping" process, forty-five men were to be selected as members of "Bones," "Keys," and Wolf's Head.

"I looked everywhere for you last night," said Badger; and Frank told him of the banquet.

"Let's go somewhere where we can talk," the Westerner invited, not relishing the throngs. "The air in here chokes me."

Merry took him by the arm, and they pushed out of the crowd.

"Now, what it is?" Frank asked.

Badger could have made a long story of it, but he cut it down to narrow limits, acquainting Merriwell, in as few words as possible, with the trouble that had come upon him. Frank looked grave.

"This is serious, Badger," he said, not caring to con-

ceal from the Kansan his true feelings concerning it. "But I'm ready to help you in any way I can."

"My fool jealousy was at the bottom of the whole thing!" Badger admitted. "Just because I was jealous of Hodge, I went on that drunk and let Barney Lynn fool me into going aboard the boat and in drugging me. Jealousy and whisky. That's what did it."

"I think you are right there."

"But, of course, Don Pike is the fellow that peached. And I'll smash his face for it! I allow that everything would have gone on as smooth as silk but for that."

"Now, what are you going to do?"

"Hanged if I know, Merriwell! I'll be driven to something desperate, soon. Tell me what the girls said about it."

"I don't think they knew anything about it. They reported that Winnie had been sick in her room, and the doctor had instructed that they were not to see her or disturb her."

"Is she in the house, then?"

"I can't tell. She may be, and she may not be. One thing is sure, Buck. Her father is not going to let you see her again. And that makes me think it possible he has spirited her out of the city. If she is in the house, the pretense that she is sick cannot be kept up long."

"I don't know about that," said the Kansan dubiously. "I allow that likely she is sick. The thing has almost sent me to bed, and the effect on her might be as bad."

"Worse, probably."

"If she is sick in that house, I'm going to see her, if I have to fight my way in."

"And be arrested. No, that's not the way, Badger. I'll see Elsie and Inza this evening, and we'll find out something definite."

"You have helped me before in this matter, Merry!" the Kansan gratefully exclaimed.

"And am ready to do so again. I feel more certain now than I did then that Winnie is not in danger of throwing herself away on you. Pardon me for speaking so plainly."

"Oh, it's all right!" the Westerner admitted, though his face colored. "I used to be a dog when I boozed round, and that's what Fairfax Lee has against me now, of course. He thinks I am the same. But I've sworn off on the stuff, and you know it."

"I'll have a talk with the girls, and we'll see then how the land lays, and what can be done."

"It will be a favor—the biggest favor, I reckon, that any man ever received."

A number of voices were shouting Merriwell's name in the campus.

"You'll have to go, I allow," said the Westerner, gripping Merriwell's hand. "But the first news you get send it to me. Don't stop for expense, or anything else. Send it along—cab, telephone, telegraph, special mes-

senger, or a dozen, if there's danger one may not reach me—anything, just so you whoop the news to me. I'll be walking barefooted on cactus spines every minute from now until you make some kind of a report."

Merriwell returned to the campus, where Yale tradition was gathering the members of the junior class back of the fence, near Durfee Hall.

The ceremony of "slapping" is peculiar in many respects. No official announcement is made of the fact that this formal and queer manner of announcing elections to the senior societies is enacted. No announcement of the coming event is given to the public. The members of the junior class are not notified by any one that they are expected to appear on that spot by the fence at a certain time to be ready to be "slapped," if they have been lucky enough to be chosen for membership in the great senior societies. Nevertheless, the entire junior class, with half the college, and hundreds of spectators from the city, gather there on the third Thursday afternoon in May, between the hours of four and six o'clock, and witness or participate in the spectacle.

"Slates" had been made up weeks before, and shrewd guesses given as to who would be chosen to this society and to that, though it was all mere guesswork. Nearly every one had agreed, however, that Merriwell would go to "Bones," as the leading society is called, and that "Bones" would be glad to get him, and would be receiving an honor as well as conferring one. Buck Bad-

ger, restless as a wolf, stood back and gloomily watched this gathering, and heard the buzz of talk and conjecture without really comprehending a word. Often he was not aware that he saw the things that were transpiring directly under his eyes.

But at length he aroused himself. Elsie and Inza had suddenly come within the range of his vision, and the sight of them stirred him out of his moody trance. He moved in their direction, but before he could come up with them, to his great disappointment, the pushing crowd swallowed them. Then he went in search of Merriwell, whom he found without trouble, for Merriwell was with the expectant juniors.

"Which way did they go?" Frank asked.

"Toward that building—I mean in that direction. But I lost them in the crowd."

"I thought they might come down this afternoon! Winnie wasn't with them?"

"No."

Frank was about to start away to find the girls, if he could, and question them in the interest of Badger and Winnie, but at that moment he was approached by Jack Diamond, one of the seniors.

Diamond walked up to Merriwell with all the dignity of the Great Mogul of Kuddyhuddy, and gave him a resounding slap on the back. Diamond belonged to "Bones," and the slap was a notification that the society had chosen Merriwell.

"I can't go now, Badger," said Frank, a bit regretfully.

Then he left the campus for his room, as each man slapped is expected to do, followed by Diamond, where he was notified formally of his election and told to appear for initiation at the society hall on Friday evening.

Of what that initiation consists no one not a member ever knows, and no member will ever tell. Its mysteries are more impenetrable than Free Masonry.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUCK AND WINNIE.

Shortly after nightfall, Badger started again for the residence of Fairfax Lee. He had no definite plans, but rather blindly hoped something might turn up to favor him. He confessed to himself that he was "all gone to pieces," but he had no desire to go into some liquor den and load up with bad whisky, as he was once accustomed to do when trouble or disappointment struck him.

"It was red-eye that got me into this, I reckon, and I'll let the stuff alone hereafter. I've promised to, and I will, no matter what comes. That's whatever!"

And when Buck Badger put his foot down he usually put it down hard.

"I'd feel better if I could only meet Don Pike and swell up his eyes for him," he continued to growl. "But the coward has sloped."

It did, indeed, seem that Pike was making an effort to keep out of the way of the Westerner. The very sight of the Lee home quickened Badger's heart-beats. He felt that he would give anything to know if Winnie was in the house, or had been spirited away.

"Like enough, her father has locked her in her room! But there ain't any keys whatever that are made strong

enough to keep me from seeing her. I'll do it sooner or later."

Fortune favored the Westerner—fortune and his sweetheart, Winnie Lee. Winnie was as wildly anxious to see Buck as he was to see her. She had been locked in her room for stubbornness in refusing to promise never to see Badger again, and the other girls had been told that she was ill and could not be seen. They knew better now, for Winnie had finally bribed and coaxed one of the servants to tell them the truth. They had not known it long, but long enough for Inza—indignant as she was brave, and brave as she was indignant—to send to Winnie a note, signed by herself and Elsie, assuring the unhappy girl of their sympathy and firm friendship. And that note was wrapped round a door-key which fitted Winnie's door, which the servant was bribed to carry.

So it came about that shortly after nightfall Winnie let herself out of her room, and creeping down some familiar halls and stairways, emerged into the grounds surrounding the house. Then she turned toward the street. She did not know what she meant to do, only she had a feeling that Buck was somewhere in the vicinity trying to find an opportunity to speak to her. She had felt sure that he would not abandon the attempt to communicate with her. She had on her jacket, with a scarf thrown over her head. She felt that she would not be easily recognized.

She stopped as she drew near the corner which gave a view down the street. There was a stir beyond the wall. The next instant a form came flying over the fence.

"Winnie!"

"Buck!"

It was Badger!

"I have been crazy to see you!" he whispered, clasping her tightly in his arms. "I knew it wasn't your fault that I did not get to see you. Have they had you locked up?"

"Yes," she answered, fervently returning the kiss. "I just got out of the room. Somehow, I felt that you were down here, and I slipped down as soon as I could."

"I knew you were true as steel," he fervently declared. "Nothing whatever could ever have made me believe otherwise."

"Did father write to you?"

"Yes. He told me never to come here again, and that I must not try to see you. I came to the house, and the servant said you were not in, and would not admit me even when I asked for Elsie and Inza. I have had an awful time."

"I have nearly died!" she confessed. "Oh, it has simply been terrible! I thought once I was going crazy. Father does not understand how he has tortured me, or he would not do it, I know. He cannot realize what it means. He simply thinks I am still a child, and that I

ought to submit to him in this matter, as I have always done in all other things."

"You are old enough now to have a mind of your own, I allow!"

"And he has heard such awful stories about you, Buck. Just terrible things."

That deep rage against Donald Pike struggled again in the heart of the Kansan.

"I think I know who told him. What were the things, anyway?"

He said this with a great dread, for he already knew.

"Oh, I knew you were not guilty, Buck! Never fancy for a moment that I thought you guilty. I told him you were innocent. I knew that it couldn't be true that you were"—she sobbed—"drunk when you went aboard the *Crested Foam.*"

Badger winced as if stabbed. The dying boat-keeper, Barney Lynn, confessed to drugging Badger, but did not tell Winnie that Badger was drunk at the time. The Westerner knew this, and had been, as he had admitted to Merriwell, just coward enough to be glad that Lynn did not tell Winnie the whole truth. Now, as the sweat of a great inward struggle came out on his face, he wished he had been courageous enough to inform her of the real facts, instead of sheltering himself behind that palatial confession of the boat-keeper. It was a virtual falsehood that was coming home to him in a most unpleasant manner.

"I have stood up for you, Buck, against everything that father could say," Winnie artlessly and innocently continued. "When he insisted that you were drunk at the time, I told him I knew it was not so; and I have stood by it. He thinks he has discovered proofs from a saloon-keeper named Connelly, who keeps a vile resort somewhere down in the worst part of New Haven. Connelly says you were intoxicated at his house that night. But I told father that the same fellow who gave him the information against you in the first place must have hired Connelly to say that. A man who will sell liquor will lie, you know, Buck!"

Badger was violently trembling, but Winnie, in the ecstatic joy of meeting him, did not notice it. There was a tempest in the Kansan's soul. Winnie's sweet and trusting faith in him filled him with an anguishing shame. Could he tell her now that he was drunk that night—that all the things said against him by Connelly and that unknown informant were true? Would she not turn against him if he did? Would she not despise him? Would not her love be obliterated? Badger felt as if the ground were reeling under his feet.

Once he was about to give away to the evil impulses that were fighing against him. But he did not. At last, as she chattered on, so strongly asserting her faith in his innocence, he caught her convulsively to him.

"Winnie!" he gasped, and his voice was so hoarse and unnatural that she was startled. "My God! Winnie,

don't say those things! I know that when I confess the truth to you you will feel that I am the biggest scoundrel that ever walked. But I must tell you. I was a coward and a fool, I reckon, for not telling you before. But I just couldn't, Winnie! But those things are true! I was drunk that night—I was at Connelly's—I was——"

Her form seemed to grow rigid in his arms.

"I must tell you the truth now, if it kills me!" he continued, almost gasping out the words. "And if you cast me off, I believe it will kill me! But it seems to me that I'd rather die than to have you think me innocent when I am guilty. I could never stand it in the world. I'm a dog, I allow! I'm not fit to associate with you whatever—not in the least! Your father is right about that. I see it now, though I didn't before. But, Winnie, I love you, and I love you! That is all I can say. I allow I haven't a right to say that now, but I must say it. You won't cast me off for this? You will give me another show? Before God, I haven't touched the stuff since that night! Not a drop! And I'll never touch it again!"

"Buck," she whispered, at last, "I wish you had told me that at the very first."

"And you wouldn't have spoken to me again?"

"Yes, Buck, I should have spoken to you again. I should have been very sorry, Buck. I should have

grieved over it, as I do now. But I should have loved you just the same, Buck."

"Then you do love me? You do not intend to tell me to go and never speak to you again?"

"Don't you understand a girl's heart any better than that, Buck? She never casts a man off for such things, if she truly loves him—though, perhaps, she ought to! Love isn't a thing of the head, but of the heart. I love you, Buck, and I am very sorry!"

He held her as if he meant never to let her go, and she submitted to his crushing caress.

"You are true—true—true as steel!" he exultantly cried.

"Be careful, or you will be heard, dear! We are right by the house, remember."

"Is your father in?"

"No, but he may return at any time. It would be terrible if he should discover us here."

"What are we to do?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. I haven't had time to think. What you have confessed has so upset me that I seem to know nothing else. I can't think of anything else. You see, Buck, I can't tell father any more that you were not—drunk that night!"

The hated word seemed to choke her.

"No!"

"And what shall I say to him?"

"I reckon that is entirely too much for me."

"But I will stand up for you all I can!"

I allow that you are an angel!" he enthusiastically declared.

"You have a low conception of angels. I can't imagine one meeting a man in this surreptitious fashion. Really, Buck, when you come to think of it, it is almost as bad as—as—what you did at Connelly's, you know!"

"Not on your life, it isn't! It's the thing I knew you would do—and there isn't any truer or better girl whatever on this earth!"

"I am glad you think so, Buck."

The Westerner was trembling as much now with delight and pleasure as he had before been trembling with apprehension. The fear that Winnie would cast him off when she knew the truth about the *Crested Foam* affair, that had so distressed him, had given place to a deep satisfaction.

"It would be dreadful if father should discover us here. I am really getting scared!" she continued.

"I reckon that there isn't any other place whatever where we can go?" he anxiously asked.

"No. But we can stand and talk here a little while. Then I shall have to hurry back into the house before my absence is noticed. One of the servants I can trust to help me, but, I am afraid, not the others."

"And Elsie and Inza?"

"Yes, of course, all they can. They have just heard

about the trouble I have been having. They thought I was sick. I don't know what they can do."

"Carry notes," Badger suggested.

"Yes. Oh, they will do what they can! They sent me a key that fits the door of my room. And they are coming up to see me to-night and to-morrow, they said in their note, in spite of the prohibition. But, of course, they will have to be careful. Father is very set when he makes up his mind to do anything, and he is very stern at times, though he loves me. He thinks he is doing the thing that he ought to do, and that he is really keeping me from throwing myself away——"

"On a drunkard!" said the Westerner bitterly.

"But you don't drink now, Buck! And you never were a drunkard!"

"Perhaps I oughtn't to blame him any whatever!" he grumbled.

"His intentions are good, but it is going to make it hard for us, for, of course, I do not mean to give you up, if he keeps on ordering me to do so from now until the day of——"

"Our marriage!"

She laughed.

"I was going to say the day of my death!"

"I allow that the day of our marriage sounds a good deal better."

"I think it does myself," she admitted, and the Kansan took this as an excuse to kiss her again.

"We'll pull out of this snarl in some way," he hopefully declared. "I don't know just how, but we'll plan something."

"Oh, I'm afraid of father!" and she shivered.

"I don't see just how we are to get round the old man's objections myself at this moment, but something may come our way. If we can continue to meet, I reckon we can plan something."

"We can meet to-morrow evening right here."

"Good. That's all right."

"And many more nights, if we are not discovered. I'll be as nice to father as I can, and perhaps he will not dream I am such a disobedient thing, after all. But I do hate to deceive him! I never did before in my life, and it strikes me as something awful. He doesn't dream that I would do such a thing."

"I think he does, or he wouldn't have locked you in. If he had trusted you, there would have been no need of that."

"True," she admitted.

"And I shall be a living lie, just as you were, Buck, when you made me think I knew all about that *Crested Foam* affair. So you see I am not much better than you were, if any. But you will never deceive me about anything again, will you, Buck?"

"Never!" the Kansan asserted.

"And if you should find out who told father?"

"I'll punch his head."

"And get into more trouble? You mustn't!"

"I know who it was. Don Pike did that, I'm certain, and if I don't pay him for it, I allow it will be because I don't get a chance."

"Don't get into more trouble!" she begged.

"There won't be any trouble—for me!"

Her fear of discovery was so great that she would not remain out long, but crept back into the house and up to her room. Badger, however, lingered, staring up at the house and vainly endeavoring to think of some plan which would enable them to overcome the violent objections of Mr. Lee.

"I allow I am in a hole," he grumbled. "But as long as Winnie has no notion of throwing me over, I shall not let any coyote weakness get the better of me! Not on your life!"

He was about to leap the fence and make his way back to the campus, when he saw a man sneak into the yard and drop down behind some shrubbery not far from the front door. He could not make out the man's face and form because of the darkness.

"Mighty queer, that is!" thought the Westerner, staring at the spot where the man had disappeared. "He don't act as if he intended to try to rustle the ranch. I reckon I'll wait a bit."

Badger had not long to wait. Fairfax Lee came down the walk from the street scarcely a minute later.

"If this wasn't New Haven, in the great and cultivated

East, I should say the fellow is laying for Lee with a gun, or a lariat!"

As Lee came down the path, the man appeared from behind the shrubbery, as if he had just returned from a visit to one of the side doors, and placed himself in front of the politician. Lee stopped in a hesitating way, and it was clear to Badger that he was afraid of this intruder.

"What are you doing here?" Lee demanded. The man advanced a step, with a threatening whine.

"You wouldn't see me at your office, and I have come here, Lee. When are you going to get me that appointment?"

Lee was one of New Haven's prominent politicians.

"I have told you that I can't do anything for you, Gaston!" he declared.

"But you said before the election that you'd git me a job!"

"I said nothing of the kind!"

"That's a lie!" the man addressed as Gaston fiercely asserted. "You wouldn't see me at the office, so I've come here, and I want justice done. You have been turning me away every day. I was right so long as I could hustle votes for you, and now I'm dirt!"

"You are simply a lunatic."

"And you mean to put me in an asylum?" the man hissed.

"That is the appointment I'll get for you, Gaston, if you trouble me."

"I'll kill you!" Gaston snarled, drawing a knife. "That's what I have made up my mind to do to you!"

"Stand aside, sir, and let me pass!" Lee commanded, though his voice was shaky. "I shall have you arrested if you——"

For reply, the man leaped at Lee with a snarl like that of an enraged dog.

"Loony as a locoed cowboy!" thought Badger. He was on the point of rushing to Lee's assistance. But there was no need. Lee, who was light on his feet, avoided the rush and ran for a side door, through which he escaped into the house, leaving Gaston to rave and mutter, and at last retreat into the street and hurry away.

Not until the man had disappeared did the Westerner leave the grounds. Then he leaped the fence, and hurried back to the campus. Here a large number of students were rollicking in the somewhat wild and reckless student fashion, to their own great delight and the amusement of hundreds of spectators.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FUN IN THE CAMPUS.

Under an elm in front of Durfee some students were gathering "fruit." They began by collecting it from members of the Chickering set. Of all the men in the college, the Chickering set were the most unpopular with their fellow students. Their silliness and superciliousness were so unbounded as to be disgusting to all sensible men. From the immaculate Rupert, with his patent-leather shoes and shining tile, down to the cowardly little lisper, Lew Veazie, they were alike detested. Hence it came about that when Rupert Chickering appeared under the famous "fruit" tree wearing a more than ordinarily gorgeous shirt, the cry of "Fruit!" was immediately raised.

Rupert uttered an exclamation of dismay and turned to run. He had heard that cry before. But he only hastened what he sought to evade. A foot outstretched for the purpose tripped him, and brought him sprawling to the ground. Before he could rise, one of the laughing students was upon him.

"See here!" he exclaimed, "I'll have you know that I will not submit to any such outrage! I know you, and I shall report you to the faculty!"

He tried to fight off the youth who held him, but a

dozen other men rushed to this youth's assistance. Then a wild-eyed fellow produced a shining pocket-knife and slowly and exasperatingly opened its sharpest blade.

"Help!" Rupert squawked.

The knife was flourished in the air, and the tag on the lower end of Rupert's shirt-bosom was deftly amputated.

"Fruit!" was again shouted, and a dash was made for Gene Skelding, who, as usual, wore a rainbow shirt that outshone Joseph's "coat of many colors."

"Help!" Skelding howled.

But a score of hands outstretched to grasp him, and he, too, went down, screeching lustily. Another knife flashed and another shirt-tag was neatly severed.

Lew Veazie, who had been with Rupert and Gene, started to run, deeming discretion the better part of valor. But he took only a step when he, too, went down. And again an amputating knife did its work. As soon as a shirt-tag was cut off, the amputator, flourishing it on the blade of his knife, like an Indian flaunting a scalp-lock, made a dash for the elm, where it was pinned up as a trophy.

Then it was found that a "taste" for shirt-tags had been created by this exciting bit of experience, and other men, who had been loudly laughing and cheering over the discomfiture of Chickering and his inane friends, found themselves suddenly on the ground, with wicked-

looking knives flashing before their eyes, and their shirts being mutilated by the pressure of keen knife-blades.

In the midst of this "fun," Buck Badger arrived on the campus from his stolen interview with Winnie Lee. Though his face wore a perplexed expression, it had lost its gloom. There might be trouble for him in the future, but Winnie's words had for the present driven the blackest of the shadows out of his heart. The desire uppermost in his mind just then was to meet and whip Donald Pike. He had sworn to himself that he would do that the first thing, and he meant to keep the oath.

Nevertheless, reaching the elms of the campus at this exciting moment, he was willing to cease temporarily his search for Pike and view the fruit-gathering. It would be rare sport, provided, of course, that his own shirt was not forced to yield "fruit."

To prevent this, and that he might see better, he grasped a low-hanging limb and swung up into one of the elms.

"Fruit!" was being shouted everywhere, and the indications were that scores of trophies would adorn the old elm the next morning, if some stop was not put to the thing by the college authorities, which was not likely. "Society week" is expected to be noisy, and things are winked at which on ordinary occasions would bring reprimands.

Another person had invaded the branches of the elm

but a minute before the ascent of the Westerner. That other person was Donald Pike, who looked down now on the man he felt instinctively to be his mortal foe with a little shiver of dread. More than once Pike had regretted making that revelation to Fairfax Lee, for the chances that discovery would come and that Badger would fiercely summon him to answer, seemed very great, when he gave himself time to reflect. And he feared Badger.

All might have gone well on this evening with Pike, however, if his fear of discovery had not made him try to climb farther up the tree. The Kansan heard the low scraping sound, in spite of the din in the campus, and glanced upward, and when he did so he saw and recognized the man he was looking for. A calcium-light was sending its rays through the higher branches, and Pike's white, scared face was as plainly revealed to Badger as if the two were facing each other in a lighted room.

The hate which Badger had been nursing swelled to the point of bursting. He forgot the search for "fruit," in which he had been interested, seeing only the enemy whom he had sworn to whip as soon as they met.

As yet they had not met; but Badger, blinded by his intense anger, decided that the meeting should come without delay, even if the place was a tree-top; and he began to climb up the trunk and boughs of the tree toward Donald. Pike looked about in a despairing way. The distance to the ground seemed dishearten-

ingly great. His first impulse, therefore, was to climb still higher, and this he began to do.

But, recollecting the tenacity of Badger's purpose in whatever the Kansan was engaged, he felt sure that he would be pursued into the very top of the tree and shaken to the ground. Therefore, he hastily crawled out over a horizontal limb, whose drooping ends dipped toward the earth. If driven to the worst, he felt that he could drop from one of those drooping ends without serious injury.

With a howl of rage, Badger climbed on after the frightened youth, and pursued him out on the horizontal limb.

But there were to be other actors in this little overhead drama. A couple of cats, chancing to be in the campus when the students invaded it, had run up this identical elm, and had crouched in wild-eyed fear on that same bough, watching the wild orgies of the students. They had probably been there for a considerable period, not daring to descend while that howling, dancing mob held the grounds. Perhaps they even fancied that those yells and ear-splitting squeals were directed against them. They must have thought so when Don Pike crawled out on the limb toward them, followed by Buck Badger.

The cats looked about, meowing anxiously. There was no other bough near which they could gain by a leap. And as Pike, looking back and gasping with

fright, crawled straight on toward them, the cat that was farthest out on the end of the limb launched itself through the air in a desperate leap for the ground.

There was no cleared space in which it could alight, and it struck Bink Stubbs on the top of the head, jamming his hat down over his eyes and hurling him backward.

"Dog my cuc-cuc-cuc-cats!" stuttered Joe Gamp, looking up in open-mouthed wonder.

"The sky is raining cats!" whooped Danny.

"Somebody amputate its tail!" yelled a student.

"Cut off its shirt-tab!" shouted another.

Bink and Danny, Gamp and all the others of Merriwell's friends who chanced to be grouped there, had already suffered the amputation of their shirt-tabs, and having no further fear on that point, were hilariously anxious that not a shirt-tab should be worn by a Yale man that night. The "fruit" on the tree at Durfee was increasing in quantity and variety at a prodigious rate.

"A dollar apiece for its ears!" some one else screeched.

But the cat was too agile for the hands that were reached out to stop its flight. It whisked under the legs of the students and was out and away like a shot.

"Been up there watching the performance!" some one sung out.

"Gug-gug-goshfry! There's a man up there!" Joe Gamp howled, as his eyes fell on Donald Pike. "It will

be raining mum-mum-men, as well as cuc-cuc-cuc-cats, next thing! Ahaw! ahaw! ahaw!"

As his lips flew open to their widest extent to emit this roar, the other cat sailed downward out of the tree and struck him squarely in the mouth. He tumbled backward with a roar, which, however, was not at all hilarious, and began to dig sputteringly at his tongue and lips, which were liberally coated with cat hair.

"More cats!" said Dismal. "I'd as soon have the frogs of Egypt, as to have the trees showering down cats."

"How do you like cat diet, Gamp?" screeched Bink, who did not relish the way he had been laughed at.

"I'll die-it, if one of 'em hits me!" Dismal solemnly asserted.

"Look out!" a student warningly yelled. "The man is coming, too!"

Everybody beneath the limb fell back out of the way, pushing against those behind, many being hurled down and trodden on. Then Donald Pike, sprawled out like one of the cats, came sailing down out of the tree. His teeth were fairly chattering. He believed that Badger was right at his heels, with hands reached out to seize him. Fortunately, he was not injured by the desperate leap.

"Fruit!" was yelled by a dozen voices, and the throng pressed together again to lay hold on him.

But Don Pike's terror gave him the strength of a

giant. He hurled aside those who sought to detain him, and leaped through the crowd and away. The next instant the Kansan dropped out of the tree, swinging for a moment by one of the drooping branches, to break the force of the fall, and alighting on the ground with ease and lightness.

"Fruit!"

The Westerner could not escape, for the students had closed in again, and he was literally ringed in.

"Fruit! fruit!" was yelled on all sides.

Twenty men threw themselves on the Kansan. He tried to hurl them off, and did succeed in flinging some of them aside. This enabled him to gain his feet.

"Let go!" he snarled.

"Fruit! fruit!" was being chorused.

Again the hands and arms closed on him.

"Let me go, I say! I want to overtake that fellow!"

Only a few near him understood his words. The majority thought he was merely showing a vigorous protest against the threatened loss of his shirt-tab, and they had no sympathy with anything of that kind, for they had suffered the same humiliation, and were naturally determined to inflict the same thing on every student they could lay their hands on.

"Let go!" Badger shrieked, white with wrath, lunging with his hard right fist.

It struck a student in the face and hurled him crash-

ingly backward. But the next moment the fist and arm were caught and held.

Then began a fierce struggle for the mastery. Time and again the Westerner, whose strength was great, hurled off the men who sought to hold him down. Twice he got on his feet, merely to be tripped and thrown again. Not until he was almost beaten and choked into insensibility were his assailants able to rip open his vest.

Ordinarily, Badger wore a soft silk shirt which had no tab, but on this night he had on a white shirt, whose tab was amputated by a dexterous thrust as soon as the vest was pulled open. Then he was permitted to rise to his feet, reeling, sick, blind with rage and humiliation and a sense of baffled hate.

But his chief thought still was of Donald Pike.

"Which way did he go?" he panted, as soon as he could get his breath.

"Well, your High-Muchness, the cats scattered and the man made himself scarce!" was the scoffing answer, given by the student who had felt the terrible force of Badger's fist. "Perhaps there is another man up in the elm who can tell you!"

Badger did not wait for further nagging, and, as no hands were now extended to oppose him, he made as hasty an exit as he could from the midst of the shouting, laughing, howling throng.

"Heavens!" he thought. "I hope that neither Inza,

nor Elsie, nor any of my friends, saw that from the dormitory windows!"

Even in the midst of his rage against Pike, Badger was cut to the quick by this thought, for he was filled with a foolish pride.

"I'll thump Pike a few extra for that!" he snarled, as he got out of the crowd. His pulse was at fever-heat, and his face as hot as flame. He did not feel the bruises and blows which had been showered on him.

"I reckon I'll not get close to him again for a week!" he grumbled. "Why couldn't those ruffians attend to their own affairs and let me attend to mine? I allow that it was none of their business whatever! This is my trail, and I wasn't interfering none with their range. Confound the luck! But when I do meet him I'll make him pay for it!"

But the Westerner was mistaken in one portion of his surmise. He met Pike, or rather ran against him, at the first building he turned.

Donald had ventured back to see what had happened to his pursuer, and was looking at the shouting tumult in the campus, and did not observe Badger, who came along the walk close to the wall. The Kansan recognized Pike first, and leaped at him with a snarl like that of an enraged panther, and as he leaped he struck a blinding blow.

It knocked Donald backward, but it did not fall fairly

enough to inflict serious injury. The next moment Badger was on him, and had him by the throat.

"By heavens! I've a notion to kill you right here!" he hissed, his fingers closing on Pike's throat.

"Don't!" Pike pleaded, gasping out the appeal.

"You told Fairfax Lee that I was drunk when I went on the *Crested Foam*. You scoundrel! You ruffian! You sneaking coyote!"

His fingers tightened with every exclamation.

"Don't kill me!" Pike begged wheezingly. "I'll go to him and take it all back!"

"Then you did tell him? I allow I ought to kick you clean out of your hide, you onery varmint!"

There was no answer, and Donald Pike, apparently ceasing to breathe, fell back as limp as a rag.

A bit of reason began to glimmer into the brain of the Westerner. Though he had asserted that he would almost kill Pike, he did not really intend to do anything of the kind. He merely meant to inflict a punishment which should be in a measure commensurate with the wrong which Pike had committed against him. But the Kansan's great rage, combined with his humiliating experience in the campus, which had still further inflamed him, had driven him to more than ordinary recklessness. He had been fairly insane. The fire began to go out of Badger's eyes when Pike did not stir and seemed not to breathe.

"I reckon I squeezed a bit too hard!" Badger mut-

tered, regarding the unconscious youth with some degree of anxiety. "Well, I was wild enough to choke his heart out!"

He stooped over Pike and saw the livid finger-marks on the throat. Still Pike did not stir, and the Westerner's anxiety correspondingly grew. He put a hand on Pike's left breast, and failed to locate the heart-beats. At last, after an alarming interval, Pike gasped, to Badger's intense relief.

"I allow I'd better let it go at this," he reflected. "I don't want to kill the skunk, though if any man whatever deserved to be murdered, he does. But I don't want anything of that kind against me. As Merry has told me, I've got an awful temper when it gets started. I shall have to watch myself against that, same as against red-eye!"

Pike gasped again, and then his breathing came at increasingly frequent intervals. The students were wildly howling in and around the campus, but Badger scarcely heard them. He was thinking only of Pike.

"This may keep him in his room a few days," he muttered.

"If it does no more than that, I don't care. He deserved that much. But he's got to keep clear of me, or I can't be responsible for the consequences. I'll tell him so as soon as he comes to himself and knows what has happened."

CHAPTER XIX.

A CRUSHING BLOW.

Buck Badger stared at a letter in a familiar handwriting which had come to his room in the afternoon mail. He had delivered to Donald Pike that threatening talk the night before, when Pike came back to the land of sentient things after that awful choking.

The infliction of this punishment on Pike, and the feeling that Winnie would stand by him in spite of everything, had so satisfied the Westerner that he had been in an uncommonly comfortable frame of mind, in spite of the fact that the powerful opposition of Fairfax Lee was yet to be overcome. With Winnie true, and time and youth in their favor, there seemed no good reason why he should be in the dumps.

But the letter at which he now gazed with starting eyes and anguished face! It was from Winnie herself, and what it said was enough to make the Kansan's brain reel:

"Mr. Buck Badger: Father knows that we met last night, and he is much displeased, as he has a right to be. I am very sorry I said to you the things I did, for we can never be anything more to each other. I have had time to think more clearly since I saw you, and this is my decision. It will do no good to talk it over,

for this is final. Therefore, if you are a gentleman, you will not try to see me again. I return to you by express your ring and the things you have given me.

"WINNIE LEE."

"I can't understand it!" he gasped, as he recalled her words of the evening before. "Yet she wrote it. There isn't any doubt whatever of that. I wish there were, but I know that handwriting too well."

He read it over again and again, as if searching out some other meaning. It seemed so impossible. Yet there it was. He got up and began to pace round the room, stopping almost every time he passed the table to take another look at the letter.

"Thrown over!" he groaned. "And after all we've been to each other! I allow she couldn't stand up against her father. How in thunder did he find out that we met last night? Some onery, spying Piute of a servant, I reckon. Well, I seem to be rounded up now, and Winnie's given me the branding-iron with her own white hand."

He mopped the sweat from his face.

"I won't accept it! That's whatever! She says that if I'm a gentleman, I'll not try to see her again. Glad I ain't a gentleman! Glad I'm a man—and I allow a man is a good deal bigger than a gentleman! I s'pose a gentleman would sit down and twiddle his fingers, and do nothing. Well, I ain't built that way! Not on your life! I'm going to see her again, whether she wants

to see me or not. I'll see her, if I have to fight my way into that house! That's whatever!"

He gave his breast a thump, as if he fancied he was striking at an enemy. His face was red and his neck veins stood out like cords. His heavy shoulders were thrown back, and his broad white teeth gleamed in a determined fashion.

"I'll find out just why she changed her mind so suddenly. Of course, it was her father's work. He has kept her under his thumb so long that she has come to the conclusion that she has to mind him in this, too! He thinks I'm not good enough for her, I allow! Well, I ain't—no man on earth is good enough for her—but I'm just as good as Fairfax Lee, any day in the week! Hanged if I don't tell him so, too!

"Yes, I'll walk into his office, if I have to knock over that clerk to do it, and I'll tell him what I think of him, if I'm arrested for it next minute. In this beastly East, instead of meeting a man and fighting him, the first thing a fellow thinks of, if he has a word with another, is to call in the police. But I'm not afraid of the New Haven police!"

Badger's heart seethed like a volcano.

"See her! Well, I reckon! I'll see her if I die for it! I'll see her, even if she refuses to speak to me! I'm going to find out what's at the bottom of this!"

While the Westerner was thus storming, an expressman came with the little package containing the ring and

the trinkets which Badger had given to Winnie. It contained no note, but the address was in Winnie's handwriting.

Badger tore the package open almost before the expressman was out of the room. A lump came into his throat as he looked at the ring. He remembered so distinctly the time he gave it to her and all the words then said. It seemed impossible that she had returned it now in this curt manner.

"I'll ask her to take it back!" he muttered. He dropped the ring into a pocket of the suit he was wearing, that he might be sure to have it with him when he met her—for that he would meet her in some way or other he was firmly resolved.

"Her father has driven her into this. It's not her wish, I know. But she is so good and dutiful that she may stick by this decision, to please him. I allow that there is where the trouble is going to come. But I won't give her up! Not unless she tells me positively with her own lips that everything is ended."

Badger now did something which he would never have dreamed of doing a short time before. Even the thought of it would have been greeted with scorn. He carefully put the letter in an inner pocket, put away the trinkets which Winnie had returned, and set out to find Frank Merriwell. The act did not even strike him as incongruous.

"Inza and Elsie will do anything for Merriwell! He

can go in and out of Lee's house as he wants to. I allow he will be glad to help me in this thing, if he can. The trail looks to be so confoundedly tangled that a bit of help in ciphering it out will be mighty welcome just now!"

He scowled as he crossed the campus and remembered the unpleasant experience of the previous night. The tree in front of Durfee still bore a large quantity of "fruit." The tab of Badger's shirt was there.

"Come over here and pick out your property!" shouted a student who was standing in a group near the tree.

Badger strode on without a word, for he was in no humor for pleasantries.

"Fruit!" squealed Danny Griswold.

"Where are you going, my pretty maid?" Bink Stubbs sang from his perch on the fence.

"Going to hunt up those cats," said the Westerner, with sarcastic scorn. "I hear their kittens squawling for them!"

Danny fell over against Bink.

"A joke from Badger!" he murmured. "Somebody fan me!"

"I'll fan you!" grunted Bink, who was not pleased with the Kansan's retort, pushing Danny roughly from him.

"Do!" begged Danny. "That took my breath. What will happen next?"

Badger swung on at a swift, nervous pace, and mounted to Frank's room.

"Come in!" Frank sung out, as the Kansan's knuckles hammered on the door.

He was rather surprised to see Badger at that hour. But he put away the book he had been studying, and pushed out a chair.

"Take a seat!" he invited.

"I reckon you'll think it's mighty funny that I should come to you for advice and help?"

"Why, no! It's a way my friends have. And they know that I am always ready to do whatever I can for them."

"Well, it's about Winnie!" said Badger bluntly. Whereupon, in a few words, he told his story.

"That rather stumps me, Badger," Frank admitted. "I think, though, that the straight way is the best. If you're willing, I will see Lee in your behalf. I shall have to admit to him that you were intoxicated at that time, but I'll try to make him see that you are pretty straight goods, for all of that. Perhaps a few words from one who knows you will be helpful."

"If you will, Merry, I can't ever thank you enough. It will be about as big a favor, I allow, as one man ever did for another, and I sha'n't forget it."

Merriwell looked at his watch.

"I can't go to his office this afternoon, but I'll see him at his house to-night. I may be late getting there,

but I'll try to time it to be there when he gets home from his club."

Badger went away as if walking on air. He could hardly think of anything else throughout the remainder of the day, and night found him in the vicinity of the Lee home, even though he had a feeling that Merriwell would prefer he should keep away from there until the result of the promised interview was known.

"I wish Merry would hurry," he thought, as he finally advanced to the fence, drawn there by his intense desire to be near to Winnie. "I'll speak to him before he goes in, and ask him to come right out as soon as possible with the news."

As he stood thus by the fence, a light step sounded, and, looking over, he recognized in the dim light the form of Winnie Lee. He was by her side at a bound.

"You must not stand by that note!" he pleadingly began. "I allow that you will see, when you think of it, that it isn't right by me!"

He did not attempt to touch her or stoop toward her. She had, in writing that letter, forbidden familiarities. Their relations toward each other were unchanged. He remembered the ring in his pocket.

"Buck! you silly fellow! Don't you know that I didn't mean to cast you off?"

"But the note?" he gasped. "It was in your handwriting? And the ring? You sent back the ring!"

"Yes, I wrote the letter because father commanded me

to write it, and I sent back the ring for the same reason. You ought to have known that!"

The change in his feelings was so great and sudden that he could hardly repress a shout.

"I reckon I'm the biggest idiot unhung!" he confessed, as he took her in his arms. "But when I saw that the writing was yours, I fancied your father had by threats, or in some way, induced you to change your mind, and that you really thought, in duty to him, you ought not to see me any more. Say, I'm too happy to think! I'm——"

"You are just a silly fellow!"

"You never shot straighter! I'm a roaring idiot!"

He kissed her and held her face toward the light in a rather vain effort to see its outline.

"I've been crazier since I got that note than any locoed cowboy that ever tore up the ranges. I've simply been wild!"

"I am very sorry, Buck. Yet I think I must have suffered as much. Last night father obtained from me a confession that I had met you in the grounds here. He asked me if I had met you, and my confused looks made my denials useless. Then he ordered me to write that note and to send back the ring. He mailed them himself. And he made me promise that I wouldn't meet you again. But when I made it, I realized that I couldn't keep it."

"You're an angel!"

"I never heard that angels were disobedient."

"Some of them."

"And they were punished for it. Oh, Buck, I hope we will never regret this—that there will be no punishment for this!"

"There won't be!" he grimly declared.

"Father is gone," she said. "Out of the city!"

"And I wanted Merry to see him here this evening," in a tone of regret. "Merry is to have a talk with him and try to get him to see that I am not such a soaking Piute as I've been painted!"

"I'm sorry, too, Buck—though I was glad."

"Glad?"

"I intended to ask you into the house. Is it very wrong?"

"I don't think so!" he whispered, joy and triumph in his voice. "Where you lead I will follow. By and by I hope we will walk abreast."

CHAPTER XX.

INTO A TRAP.

When Buck and Winnie walked into the house, they walked into a trap, though the laying of a trap for them was not contemplated by Mr. Lee.

Encountering none of the servants, Winnie conducted Badger into the parlor.

"Merriwell will be here soon, I allow."

"We're not afraid of Merriwell!"

"Only thinking that you and I want to have this meeting all to ourselves. Then the servant that shows Merriwell up, if one does, may see us, and I calculate that I ain't hankering to meet up with any of your servants on this trip. None whatever!"

But Winnie was not disturbed.

"Father is going over to Hartford to-night on business," she laughed, laying aside the scarf and jacket. "I heard him say to the cook that he wouldn't return before to-morrow."

There was a certain exultant defiance in Badger's bearing that made him, in spite of his bulky, heavy shoulders and modern clothing, somewhat resemble some ancient knight ready to do battle for his "ladye fair." Winnie Lee observed it, and was pleased. The Westerner's devotion was so true that she felt rather proud of

it. And, indeed, Badger, in spite of his many faults, failings, and weaknesses, had some admirable traits of character.

All at once Winnie heard footsteps approaching the door of the parlor. She thought the steps were those of a servant, and blamed herself for not closing the door. Then a familiar form appeared in the doorway, and her cheeks grew white. Buck Badger looked up at the same moment, and his dark face flushed.

Fairfax Lee had changed his mind about going to Hartford! He had returned home, let himself into the house, and walked up-stairs. Seeing the light in the parlor, he had approached the door.

He was as much astonished as the lovers. For a moment not a word was spoken. Winnie seemed about to swoon, and Badger put a hand on her shoulder, as if to support her. Then Mr. Lee broke the silence, and stepped into the room.

"What is the meaning of this disobedience?" he sternly demanded, speaking to Winnie.

She staggered to her feet, trembling before him. Badger sprang up, erect and defiant.

"I thought you promised me that you would never meet him again?"

She did not answer.

He turned with flashing eyes on the Westerner.

'And I forbade you the house, sir!"

Badger wanted to take him by the throat.

"See here, Mr. Lee!" he said, in a voice that demanded a hearing. "I know you told me that I wasn't welcome in this house, and I reckon I know full well that I am not welcome. But that's no sign that I am going to stay out of it, as long as it shelters your daughter!"

"Winnie, you will go to your room!"

He advanced toward her, and she drew away from Badger. But she did not go toward the door. Her father stepped to her side.

"There is the door!" Lee commanded, addressing the Kansan.

"I see it," said Badger. "You don't need to show it to me!"

"Will you go out of it? Will you leave this house?"

Fairfax Lee was panting with rage. "Get out of this room!" he cried.

Badger straightened his thick shoulders, and his broad, white teeth gleamed unpleasantly.

"Mr. Lee, you are Winnie's father, and because of that I shall pay no attention to your insults; but I tell you now, that you may understand it, that I love your daughter and intend to marry her!"

"By heavens, you never shall!"

"It may be a long trail, Mr. Lee, but there will be a home-coming at the end of it. I shall see her as often as I can, and I shall write to her when I can, and I shall marry her! I have promised to, and I'll do it!"

"Never speak to my daughter again!" Mr. Lee thundered, pointing Badger to the door.

"Good night, Winnie," said the Kansan, as he passed out. "There will be better days by and by."

Then he fairly reeled down the stairway, sick and giddy and almost gasping, yet shaking with rage against Fairfax Lee.

Badger waited in the vicinity of the house in a fever of impatience until Merriwell appeared. Though a more inauspicious time, seemingly, could not have been found, he had strong confidence in Frank's ability to aid him. It was a feeling which was invariably produced in the hearts of all.

He met Merriwell at some distance from the Lee residence, and drew him away for a talk, in which he acquainted him with what had taken place. Then Frank went on into the house, and the Westerner recommenced his vigil.

The interview which shortly followed between Frank and Mr. Lee was of an interesting and important character. Fortunately, Fairfax Lee had a very high opinion of Frank Merriwell. Otherwise he would not have heard him at all in behalf of Badger. Even as it was, he at first listened with nervous impatience, unwilling to believe that anything could be presented in the Westerner's behalf.

Merriwell went over the whole ground with great candor and frankness. He admitted that Badger was in-

toxicated when lured aboard the *Crested Foam*. But he asserted his belief that the Kansan was all right at heart. He laid stress also on the fact, which was now clearly understood by Fairfax Lee, that Winnie loved the Kansan; and he insisted that the latter had no real taste for liquor, but was driven into his debauch by a fit of jealousy.

"I will think over this," Lee promised. "As you say, I have no desire to be unjust; still less do I wish to be harsh beyond what is necessary. I once thought well of Badger. I can't say more now. His actions have seemed to me very low and very dishonorable."

The long interview ended with this. But Merriwell, not realizing that Badger was still waiting for him in wild anxiety, made a call on Inza and Elsie, which was so pleasant that it was much more protracted than he had intended it should be, and the hour grew late.

In the meantime, other things were hurrying events to a climax. Fairfax Lee had hastened home that night in fear of his life. Bill Gaston, once a useful political worker, who had been driven insane by his failure to secure an appointment he craved, and who the day before had been locked up for threatening Lee's life, had escaped and was at large. That the man was crazy there could be no doubt, and that he would shoot Lee on sight seemed just as certain.

Buck Badger, wandering like a restless spirit in the vicinity of the house, saw a man leap the fence and

sneak toward a rear entrance. The man's general appearance and crouching attitude were like those of the crazed office-seeker whom Buck had once seen threatening Lee in that very place.

"After Lee again!" was Badger's conclusion. "I reckon I'd better camp on his trail. He said he would kill Lee, and that must be what he is up to!"

Thereupon, Badger also leaped the fence and slipped through the shadows in the direction taken by the man he supposed to be Gaston.

"Eh! what does that mean?"

Badger stopped stock-still. He saw several men beneath a window, which they had forced open. One man was being helped through.

"Can't be a band of assassins, I allow? More likely a lot of burglars trying to crack the crib."

The Westerner was right in his guess. These were not friends of Bill Gaston bent on assassination, but housebreakers, whose cupidity had been aroused by the fact, which had chanced to come to their knowledge, that a diamond brooch worth ten thousand dollars had recently been taken from the Lee residence. A crib which held such valuables seemed to them a good one to rip open, and they had obtained information that Fairfax Lee was expected to be away from home that night. They had found that most of the servants were out, too, and because of this it appeared safer to make the raid at an early hour, before the servants returned.

Badger stood in indecision in the shadows, wondering what course he ought to pursue. Before he could make up his mind, the first burglar had disappeared, and a second was being helped through the window. Two of the burglars—there were four or five of them, as Badger could see—were to wait outside, while their pals on the inside made their search for valuables.

Suddenly there came a cry for help from within the house, followed by the sounds of a struggle. Fairfax Lee, unable to sleep and wandering as restlessly about within the house as the Westerner had upon the outside, had come unexpectedly upon the first burglar at the upper landing of the rear stairway. The burglar looked so marvelously like the crazy office-hunter, Bill Gaston, that Lee believed him to be Gaston, and that Gaston had invaded the house for purposes of assassination.

Though Lee had dreaded a meeting with Gaston, and would have gone far out of his way to avoid anything of the kind, he was by no means a coward. He expected a shot from Gaston's pistol, and to prevent this, he hurled himself on the burglar with a suddenness and boldness that took the latter by surprise.

The cry for help did not come from the lips of Fairfax Lee, but from those of the burglar. Badger, however, fancied that the call had come from Lee. Without waiting to consider the danger, or to ask himself how he was to account for his presence in the grounds and in the house, Buck Badger ran toward the open window.

As he did so, he saw two of the other burglars leap through. They were going to the assistance of their pal. Then a shot sounded.

Badger crossed the intervening distance at a sprinting pace, and found himself suddenly confronted by the burglar who was still on guard at the window. A pistol gleamed in the dim light. Badger knocked it aside, struck the man a blow that would have felled an ox, and went through the window with a flying leap that took him to the foot of the stairway.

He saw the two burglars on the stairs near the top. One held a dark-lantern and the other a heavy jimmy. Above, the sounds of the fight continued, and the burglar attacked by Lee was still bawling for help.

Fairfax Lee felt that he was fighting for his life, and he still believed that he was fighting Bill Gaston. He did not hear the burglars on the stairs. He was trying to get the supposed Bill Gaston by the throat and choke him into subjection. The burglar's shot, fired almost pointblank at Lee, had done him no injury, and now the weapon was on the floor.

"Help!" bellowed the burglar.

He got his throat free, but he could not throw off those clutching hands. Visions of striped clothing and prison officials loomed before him, for he had once done time. His anxious ears heard what Lee did not—the calls of the ruffians who were hurrying to his assistance—and he fought like a tiger.

Buck Badger went up the stairway in quick leaps. If the burglars heard him, they must have fancied he was the guard left at the window, for they did not look round. But before the Kansan could reach the upper landing, the three scoundrels were on Lee.

"Clip him on der head!" one of them growled. "Don't use yer barker—too much noise! Hit him wid der jimmy. All der cops in New Haven will be in dis crib in a minute!"

Fairfax Lee was still putting up a stiff fight, and the jimmy flashed in the air. Before it could descend, Buck Badger flung himself into the midst of them, with the impetuous leap of a mountain-lion. The man with the uplifted jimmy went down before a blow from the Kansan's fist, and the other was hurled aside. The burglar that Lee had been fighting tore himself loose and turned toward Badger and the stairway. Then the Westerner heard the ominous click of a revolver. These burglars, like all of their craft, were ready to do murder if it seemed necessary.

Lee tripped the burglar with the revolver, and the shot went into the floor. The other burglar was coming up the stairway with tremendous leaps. The house seemed to be arousing. Badger heard a woman scream.

"Kill him!" was panted by one of the villains.

Then the jimmy descended, and though the Westerner tried to knock the blow aside, his arm was beaten down, and the jimmy fell on his head with crushing force.

Badger's head seemed to split open under that blow, and a blur of blood and mistiness followed. He felt himself reeling and sinking, with his feet slipping on the stairway, toward which he had fallen. Then he dropped like an ox in the shambles.

But before complete unconsciousness came, he heard the shout of a well-known voice—the voice of Frank Merriwell!

Merriwell came upon the scene from a corridor, having been drawn by the calls and the pistol-shots, and with marvelous quickness and certainty grasped the whole intent of what he beheld.

Fairfax Lee struck aside the revolver that was pointed at Frank, and again began to call for help. The next instant Merriwell was in the thick of the fight. Though no man could have understood his peril more perfectly, there was at that moment in Merriwell's heart a wild thrill of joy. He laughed as he struck at the nearest ruffian—a laugh that sounded strangely out of place.

The blow fell with crushing force, and the ruffian tumbled backward against the wall. Before Merriwell could turn, two of the other three ruffians were on his back. One had drawn a knife and the other had the jimmy. The remaining burglar was on the stairs, and was lifting a revolver. Merriwell lunged toward him, and the man, instead of firing, lost his footing, and went tumbling down the steps.

Inasmuch as he had a revolver, he seemed the most

dangerous, and Frank leaped after him, dragging with him the scoundrels who were trying to strike him from behind. But the terrible fall knocked the breath out of the burglar, and he slid helplessly on down the stairway, letting the revolver go bumping and clattering to the floor below. Merriwell wheeled with lightning quickness to meet the man with the threatening jimmy.

Badger seemed to be slipping down the stairway, also. Then Frank saw him lift himself and try to stagger to his feet. Without taking further note of this, Merriwell promptly closed with the other burglar on the stairs.

"Shoot him, Bill!" the fellow cried, to his pal above.

But that worthy, believing that "he who fights and runs away may live to fight another day," was making tracks for the nearest window, intending to leap to the ground.

The burglar who had closed with Frank, endeavored to trip him, with the result that he was himself shot over Frank's head, and went to the bottom of the stairs at a flying leap, bowling over his pals, who were trying to get on their feet and pull themselves together. Merriwell caught the stairway rail, down which he slid almost as quickly. His hand closed on the revolver which had fallen to the floor; and, with it cocked and leveled, he wheeled, facing the men, who, swearing horribly, were again trying to gain their feet.

"Surrender!" he sharply called.

The answer was an oath.

"Surrender, or by the gods of war I'll drop you one and all right where you are! Up with your paws!"

They knew he meant it, and there was no escape. The next moment the three burglars at the foot of the stairs put up their hands in token of submission.

* * * * * * *

Badger sat in his room. His bandaged head ached painfully, but in his heart there was a glow of pleasure. The surgeon had told him that he would be all right in a day or two, and he had just received a note from Winnie Lee.

"Dear Buck," it read, "I have had a long talk with father. He says that both you and Merriwell fought like heroes, and that your prompt appearance on the scene no doubt saved his life. In spite of this, though, he is not willing that I shall receive calls from you. But I can see that his opposition is not nearly so strong as it was, and I have hopes that it will soon disappear altogether. Father says that the burglars which Merriwell captured will no doubt be sent to State's prison. Thank Frank for me for his great favor in speaking to father for you, as he did—for I can see that father's change toward you is due more to Frank's talk than to your fight, brave as that was. I will meet you as often as I can, Buck, and I will send you a note every day. And we will be true to each other always, in spite of father's opposition. Your sweetheart, WINNIE."

"There never was any girl truer!" muttered the Kansan, as he read and reread the note. "That's whatever!

She is true as steel! But," he continued, "how can I thank Merriwell for his part in the affair? He pulled me through, all right, and there's no mistaking that fact."

Hardly had he uttered these words, than a knock came at the door. "Come in," said Buck—and in walked Frank himself!

"Well, I'm glad to see you," said Buck, "and that's whatever! I want to know how I can thank you for what you've done for me in this affair, in going to Winnie's father in the way you did."

A gleam came into Frank's eyes as he sat there, and a smile played on his lips.

"My dear fellow," he said finally, "I don't want any reward from you or any one else for what I do, by way of helping them out. I do the best I can in that respect—the same as you or anyone else would do—and that's reward enough for me—a clear conscience! Thanks, all the same, Buck."

CHAPTER XXI.

BAD NEWS.

So sunshine follows storm!

It was a jolly party aboard the *Merry Seas,* as she bowled along on her way from New Haven to New York. It was composed of Frank Merriwell and a number of his intimate friends; and wherever Frank and his friends were, Dull Care usually hid his agued face and gave place to smiling Pleasure.

"That grumbling old boatman at the New Haven wharf was a liar!" groaned Dismal Jones, as if it were a grief that he had not found the boatman's unpleasant prognostications true.

"What did he say?" asked Danny Griswold, who had been prancing the deck like a diminutive admiral, stopping now and blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke from his nostrils.

"He said that a smoker of cigarettes is always a measly runt!" grunted Bruce Browning, from the big chair in which he had ensconced himself almost as soon as he came aboard, and which he had hardly left since.

"You're another!" said Danny. "He didn't say anything of the kind."

"He was a poet," said Dismal, "and he threw his com-

ment into rime. I was taken in by him, I suppose, because he seemed to be half-way quoting Scripture:

"'The Pharisees were hypocrites,
And the *Merry Seas* is a ship o' fits!'"

"A ship o' fits? Nothing eccentric about this steamer, so far as I can see!"

"Except Danny Griswold!" exclaimed Bink Stubbs. "He is enough to give anything fits."

"Something your tailor is never able to give you!" Danny retorted.

"Sit down!" growled Browning. "You are shutting out the view!"

"What view?" Danny demanded.

"The view of the steamer's funnel. I'd rather look at that. It can smoke and keep still—and you can't."

Inza and Elsie came along, accompanied by Merriwell and Bart Hodge. Winnie Lee, who was at present under her father's displeasure for her persistence in continuing to encourage Buck Badger, was not aboard, but Amy May was a member of the party. At the moment, she was conversing gaily with Bernard Burrage, Inza's semi-invalid father, on the forward-deck.

"We're going to have a fog!" said Merriwell, speaking to Bruce and those near. "I have been hoping it would hold off until we reach New York, but it isn't going to."

"I'd rather be in a ship that has fits now and then,

than to be stuck in a fog-bank!" Bink declared. "I guess that New Haven boatman was a prophet, after all."

The *Merry Seas* was a steamer running on a somewhat irregular schedule to New Haven and New London, and back to the great metropolis by the sea route along the ocean side of Long Island, touching at one or two Long Island points.

Merriwell's friends had decided on a steamer voyage to New York and back as a change from the usual work and athletics at Yale. Not that they were tired of either. But nothing of signal importance was on the program to detain them in New Haven, and they were away, therefore, for this short trip by boat.

The ordinary Sound route between New Haven and New York was familiar ground to every member of the party, and something new was desired. Hence they had taken the *Merry Seas,* which had steamed to New London, and out to sea between Block Island and Montauk Point, and had then laid her course down the Long Island coast for New York harbor.

Inza laughed at Bink's lugubrious declaration. Gamp was laughing, too.

"If we get stuck in a fog, we can have Joe Gamp yell a few times for us. That will do for a fog-horn."

"Then the *Merry Seas* will have fits, sure enough!" said Bink.

Gamp looked serious.

'Well, honest, now, that dud-dud-don't sus-sound so

funny to mum-me as it dud-does to you. Owned a cuc-cuc-carf once, that was pup-prancing raound in the medder pup-pup-pasture, and I gug-got so tickled that I just sus-set daown and hollered. Goshfry! you wouldn't believe it, bub-bub-but that cuc-carf fell over dead's a stun wall!"

"Gave it heart-disease, of course!" Bink gravely observed. "Not to be wondered at."

"I'm just tut-tut-telling this story as a warning tut-to you!" Joe solemnly observed. "The hoss dud-dud-doctor said that the pup-poor thing's head was weak. Sus-so when we get into a fuf-fog and I begug-gin to holler, bub-bub-better pup-put cotton into your ears, Binky!"

Stubbs fell back into Danny's arms.

"Ar-r-r-r!" he gurgled. "I've got 'em now. Fits!"

"I'll give you fits, if you don't stop tumbling over against me!" Danny howled, giving Bink a push that landed him in Browning's lap. Everybody laughed, and Merriwell and his companions walked on round the steamer's rail.

"It hurts me to think that I must separate soon from all those jolly fellows!" Merry observed, in a saddened voice. "But commencement is rushing this way at railroad speed, and most of them will go out of Yale then forever."

"We'll not get blue about it until we have to," said Elsie, though the thought had saddened her more than once.

"Just see how the fog is coming down!" Inza observed.

"Hello!" cried Hodge, "another vessel!"

A steamer hove into view through the thickening mist. The boats began to sound their whistles.

"A sort of Flying Dutchman!" remarked Merriwell, and, indeed, the passing steamer did seem more a phantasm of the fog than a real vessel carrying living, breathing people. The *Merry Seas* sounded her whistle at frequent intervals as she pushed on into the fog, and for some time after the steamer had vanished her hoarse whistle could also be heard.

"Hello!" cried Browning, who had been lazily looking over some late New York papers.

The tone and the change in his manner told that he had come on a startling piece of news.

"What is it?" Diamond asked.

"Maybe only the same name!" said Browning, and then read this paragraph from the telegraphic columns:

"A young Irishman named Barney Mulloy was attacked and killed by hoboes near Sea Cove, on the coast not far from Sandy Hook, yesterday morning. The object of the tramps was doubtless robbery, as Mulloy is known to have had a considerable sum of money on his person."

Browning looked up questioningly.

"Likely another fellow, though!" he said.

"By Jove! I'm afraid not!" exclaimed Frank, who had hastily taken the paper from Bruce, and was staring in consternation at the fateful item.

"There may be a hundred Barney Mulloys!" said Rattleton.

Frank shook his head.

"I had a letter from him a few days ago, and he was then stopping at Sea Cove. He was making money, too!"

Merriwell felt stunned. Barney Mulloy had been one of his dearest friends, faithful and honest, kind-hearted and true, jolly and hopeful. Through all of his hilarious experiences at Fardale, Frank had not a stancher adherent. And now Barney was dead, slain by a lot of miserable tramps! Tears of honest grief and indignation came into Frank's eyes.

"Barney Mulloy dead?" exclaimed Inza, coming up at that moment and hearing the news.

"What?" cried Elsie.

"Report in the *Herald*," Frank answered. "Killed yesterday by hoboes, somewhere below Sandy Hook."

Bad news spreads as if by magic. In a little while the other members of the party, having read the story for themselves or heard of it from others, gathered round Merriwell.

"Well, he was an honest boy," said Hodge, a noticeable tremor in his voice.

"A better-hearted lad never lived!" Merriwell asserted.

Frank's mind went back to Fardale, and, grieved as he was, he could again hear the yells of Barney Mulloy and Hans Dunnerwust, when they crawled into bed with the lobsters, which they thought were centipedes. It had been one of the funniest incidents of the Fardale days, for both thought they were poisoned by the bites of the creatures, and that they would surely die. The whole thing had been a practical joke, in which Frank had played a prominent part. And now Barney, the mischievous, the loyal, the reckless, was dead!

"I can hardly believe it!" Merry declared. "It doesn't seem possible. But there is one thing! I shall spend some money in having those hoboes hunted down and punished for their crime."

"I wish I could have happened along there about the time they jumped on him!" growled Hodge, and the light in his dark face showed that he would have done his best to make it hot for the hoboes if he could have put his hands on them. "Barney had the right kind of stuff in him."

This depressing bit of news took all the merriment and life out of the little party. And, as the steamer wallowed on through the increasing fog, the world seemed suddenly to have become wrapped in gloom.

"Wish we'd stayed in New Haven!" grunted Brown-

ing. "I'll have to smoke faster to keep warm, or go below."

"And I wish we were in New York," said Bink. "There is something there to warm up the blood."

Danny looked at him.

"Drinks? Likely the captain has a private bottle tucked away somewhere that he will give you a nip out of."

"Life, I mean. Pulsing streets, swarms of people, theaters, hand-organs——"

"Oh, yes, a monkey is usually lost away from a hand-organ!"

"I suppose that is why you always seem so lonesome! When Merry is sad, we all are—grumpy! New York would help to lift us out of the dumps."

CHAPTER XXII.

ADRIFT IN THE ATLANTIC.

"So thick you might cut it with a knife!"

Captain Darien, who had walked forward and joined the group of Merriwell's friends, looked off into the wall of gloom as he said this. The *Merry Seas* was mournfully blowing her whistle, and others were continually heard. The steamer was nearing New York harbor.

"Will you try to run in, captain?" Frank asked.

"Oh I think we can make it. I don't like to anchor out here all night. I have a pretty good idea of just where we are."

"The fog may lift before night."

The captain looked at his watch, and saw that it indicated nearly three o'clock.

"I'm afraid not. And likely it will be no better in the morning. I shall try to go in."

A fog-siren somewhere on the invisible shore was sending out its unearthly blasts. Then a whistle seemed to cut the gloom right ahead, and a big black shape loomed through the murk. The *Merry Seas* sounded her warning, and the helm was jammed hard a-starboard. Another shriek came from the phantom that had seemed

to rise right out of the sea. With that shriek, she also swung off.

"I thought we were in for a collision!" said Frank, breathing more freely. "It will be a squeak as it is."

Elsie had nervously clutched him by the arm. All were moving back from the dangerous vicinity toward the other rail.

"A tug!" said Bart, who was standing near Merriwell.

The tug, which was a large one, seemed now fairly on top of them. In size, it was as large or larger than the *Merry Seas*. A collision of the two vessels would be a serious thing.

"We're going to strike, or scrape!" Frank warned, taking Inza and Elsie each by an arm. "Brace for it!"

Orders were being given, and the whistles were hoarsely blowing. Both vessels were still falling off. Some one on the tug bellowed frantically through a big trumpet.

"What was that?" Inza asked.

"Tows!" said Frank. "Something about tows!"

The tug and the steamer did not strike, though they grazed each other so closely that a collision seemed unavoidable. Then there was more bellowing through trumpets and more whistling, and Frank felt the *Merry Seas* tremble under him as her engines were reversed. He knew not what to expect.

Crash!

The big tug, *Gladiator,* had a string of heavily laden barges in tow. Into one of these barges, in spite of every effort to prevent it, the bow of the *Merry Seas* crashed with terrible force. It was as if a horse should rush headlong against a stone wall.

The shock was terrific. Merriwell heard a sound of smashing timbers and snapping iron. He was pitched violently from his feet as the bow of the *Merry Seas* was forced downward by the collision. He felt himself flying through the air. Then he struck the water, and went down, down, down!

But Frank did not lose consciousness. And as he came to the surface, he supported himself by a gentle motion of his hands and feet, and tried to look about. He knew how great was his peril. But his thoughts were not wholly of himself. He thought of Inza and Elsie, of Hodge and his other friends. What had befallen them? Had they, too, been hurled into the sea by that awful shock? If so, there could be little doubt that some of them, if not all, would be drowned.

He shouted for assistance, and heard a hoarse whistle not far away. He could see nothing, for the fog was as impenetrable as a blanket. He began to swim toward the sound. He could not tell whether the whistle was that of the tug or the *Merry Seas* or of some other vessel. Again he sent up a call for help. The water was cold and his clothing heavy. He was thinking of try-

ing to get out of his shoes and outer coat, when he heard a human cry not far away.

"Help! help!" some one called.

"Help! help!" Frank shouted.

But instead of swimming on, he turned in the direction of the cry. It indicated a human being in distress and peril, and he felt that he might be able to save a life.

"Help!" came the cry again.

The voice was so choked and thick, and there was such a rush of water in his ears that Merry could not tell much about it, yet it seemed familiar. It was near at hand, too; and, sending back an answering call, Frank swam straight toward it.

"Help!" was shouted, right at hand now, for the voice seemed to be drifting toward him.

"Where are you?"

For answer, Merriwell received a heavy blow on the head and breast from a piece of timber. He went under with a cry, his head ringing and his senses reeling.

The next thing he knew, he was stretched out on some sort of raft, and some one was holding him there by sheer force. His feet and legs were trailing through the water. The whistle of the steamer or tug sounded again, but farther away.

"Is that you, Merry? How are you feeling?"

It was a familiar voice, though thick and husky—the voice of Bart Hodge.

It steadied Merriwell's reeling brain. He took hold of the boards and sought to draw himself still higher on them.

"That you, Hodge?"

"Yes. I thought that was you, Merry. How are you?"

"Soaked. But I guess I am all right. Something hit me on the head and shoulders, and I went under. I was swimming this way. Heard somebody call."

"I called, and you were struck by this drift. I heard you, and felt the shock when you struck. I reached out and got hold of you—and here you are?"

"Yes, here—and where is that?"

"In the Atlantic, somewhere off New York. I doubt if the captain knew."

"What became of the rest of the crowd?"

"Don't know. That collision threw me clean over the rail. I fell near these boards. I don't know but they came from the barge. When I came up, I bumped against them, and then hung on and began to call for help."

There was a moment of silence. Both were listening. Whistles could be heard here and there. Off to the left somewhere they fancied they heard a voice calling, but whether it came from the deck of a vessel or from some unfortunate in the water they could not de-

termine. Near and far the whistles of steamers and tugs were hoarsely bellowing.

"With so many vessels around, we ought to be picked up soon," said Hodge.

"We would be, if any one could see anything. But a boat would have to run right over us to find us. Hark! wasn't that rowlocks?"

Again they listened. The sound of oars was certainly heard.

Clug-clank, clug-clank, clug-clank.

"Let us call together," said Merry. "Now! As loud as you can."

Both shouted with all their might. For an instant they fancied the boat was coming toward them, and they shouted again. But it was almost impossible to determine the direction of sound. They could not themselves be sure of the direction of the boat. The "clug-clank" grew fainter and fainter.

"We're bound to be picked up soon," Merriwell cheerily declared. "We must be right in the track of vessels. We'd be picked up right away if it wasn't for this beastly fog."

Hodge was silent.

"What do you suppose has become of the others? They were right with us, you know, when we went over!"

"I'm afraid to think about it," said Frank, with a shudder, which was not caused by the chill of the water.

"I can't help thinking about it!"

"Nor I. But I'm hoping we were the only ones that went overboard. We must try to believe that, Bart, until we cannot believe it any longer."

Hodge was silent.

"And as for ourselves!"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of ourselves," said Bart. "We can hang on here a good while, I think. I suppose we're being carried out to sea, though!"

"Not much doubt of that, I guess. But we've pulled through worse scrapes together, Bart!"

"That's right, Merry! And we'll pull through this. Are you up high enough on the boards? Let me help you! You can't be feeling very strong after that blow."

Merriwell drew himself higher out of the water, and found that the heavy board supported his weight.

"If only the fog would clear now! I hear a whistle away off there."

"Do you suppose the *Merry Seas* was sunk?" Hodge asked.

"I sha'n't think so until I have to. I think the barge got much the worst of it. The steamer seemed to cut it right in two."

"Perhaps we can get up higher on these boards."

"I've been thinking of that myself," Hodge answered.

The two friends had locked hands across the narrow space that separated them. Now, by Merriwell first helping Bart and then Bart returning the favor, they

managed to get up higher out of the water, and were gratified to find that the boards were sufficiently buoyant to sustain them.

For fifteen or twenty minutes they had thus drifted on, talking and conjecturing, listening at intervals, and now and then sending up a loud call. The fog-siren on the shore was still screeching, and the whistles of vessels were now and then heard. But about them was that impenetrable gray wall of fog.

Having secured an easier position, Frank fumbled with his chilled fingers for his watch, which he finally drew out. It was wet, of course, but, to his surprise, was still merrily ticking away. By holding it near his eyes the time could be told.

"About half an hour, I judge, since the collision."

"No more than that? Seems to me it has been a half a day."

Again there was silence.

"I should think a vessel would anchor, instead of trying to go on in such a fog as this!" Bart snarled.

The memory of the disaster was beginning to make him bitter against the captain.

"They do, usually. The captain thought he could make his way in, that is all!"

"And I'm afraid some of our friends have gone to the bottom as a result of it. We seem in a good way to investigate Davy Jones' locker ourselves!"

"I'm going to believe that our friends are all right. It can't be possible that both the tug and the steamer sank. The tug wasn't really in the collision, you know. She would be able to take off every one from the steamer, no doubt, even if the steamer was so injured that she could not float. The thing I most fear is that some of them may have been hurled overboard, just as we were, and were not lucky enough to find anything to sustain them. But I shall not believe anything of the kind as long as I can hope that it isn't so."

But for Merriwell, Hodge would have been very despondent, especially as the long hours of the afternoon began to wear on and no boat came near them, and their frequent cries seemed to remain unheard; but Frank's hopefulness and cheerful optimism were not without good effect on the mind of his friend, and they were even able at times to talk with some degree of mental comfort.

Frank was sure that they were steadily drifting out to sea. He believed, from the change in the apparent direction of the fog-siren, that they were moving down the coast toward Sandy Hook. But they were evidently floating farther out to sea, for the sounds of the siren were fainter and farther away.

"I believe the fog is going to lighten."

Merriwell lifted himself and strained his eyes through the gloom. A suggestion of a breeze had fanned him.

"If the wind gets up, the fog may be driven away," he said.

"And the wind will kick up a sea!" suggested Bart.

"But if the fog lifts, we will probably be seen by some vessel!"

There could be no doubt that a gentle breeze was beginning to blow.

"Sure enough, the fog is thinning!" Bart cried joyfully. "But I don't hear any more whistles."

"Hark! there one sounded."

"Miles away!"

"Wait till the fog rises. Perhaps there are others."

Anxiously they watched the gray wall. The wind died away, and once or twice it seemed that the fog was growing denser, instead of lightening. But by and by the sunlight seemed to permeate it. It appeared to become thinner. Then, like a great curtain uplifted, it for a little while swung upward from the face of the heaving sea. All around were the green rollers, rising and falling with an oily swell.

Hodge uttered an exclamation of gratification.

"Look!"

Merriwell looked in the direction indicated. Not a fourth of a mile away a dingy fishing-sloop was bobbing along, with her dirty mainsail and jib set, yet seeming to catch no breeze. Both Merry and Hodge forgot their discomfort, forgot their chilled and benumbed condition, and, lifting themselves as high as they could, shouted for assistance.

There must have been some breeze in the dingy sails,

for the vessel was moving athwart the line of their progress, and they were being carried along by the tide.

"Shout again!" said Merriwell, and again they lifted their voices together.

In another direction a steamer could be seen, but those on the steamer evidently did not see the sufferers on the raft.

"I don't believe there is a soul on the sloop!" Bart declared, in a despairing way.

"Well, if she keeps on her course, we'll get so near that perhaps we can swim to her and climb on board."

But Bart was wrong. Hardly had he made the declaration, when a man appeared on deck, accompanied by a shaggy dog.

Merriwell and Hodge renewed their cries to attract his attention. But the man gave them absolutely no heed. Once they fancied that the dog turned his nose in their direction.

"He don't want to see us," Bart growled. "We are near enough for him to hear! I——"

His sentence was interrupted by a young lady who rushed suddenly on deck from the "cuddy" or cabin. A scream issued from her lips as she appeared, and immediately a second man came into view, from whom she seemed to be fleeing.

"My God! Inza Burrage!"

Merriwell fairly shouted the words.

Inza did not see the raft and her friends. She ap-

peared to see only the shaggy-bearded fellow, who now stood grimly looking at her.

"She's going to jump overboard!" cried Hodge, so excited that he almost fell off the raft.

Merriwell shouted with all his might. Inza turned and saw the raft. She uttered another piercing cry, stretched out her hands, and seemed again about to leap into the sea.

Instead of heeding the cry sent up by Merriwell, Inza's pursuer leaped at her to prevent her from jumping over the rail; and, then, bearing her in his strong arms, deliberately carried her back into the cuddy.

Merriwell and Hodge shouted, yelled, screamed. The one man on the deck paid not the slightest attention to their cries.

"He refuses to hear us!" said Hodge.

The other man appeared, and they called again. One of the men went to the tiller, and the course of the sloop was changed.

"They are going to pretend that they did not see us," Frank exclaimed.

"Hold to the raft, Hodge! Stay by it!"

"What are you going to do?" Hodge demanded.

"I'm going to swim to that sloop!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE FISHING-SLOOP.

"Stay with the raft," Merriwell again commanded.

"But I want to go with you! You will need help!"

"Perhaps I may have to return to the raft. I can't find it if you leave it."

"We can get on that vessel. And perhaps, if you go alone, you will be killed."

Merriwell was as anxious and almost as much excited, but he kept his head.

"Don't you see that the sloop is moving on the new tack. She may be going faster than I can swim. Stay on the raft!"

As he gave this last command, he slipped out of his heavy, soaked outer coat, quickly removed his shoes, and, pushing these articles to Hodge, let himself into the sea, and began to swim toward the dingy fishing-sloop. Hodge did not again shout, for he saw that Merriwell's plan was to swim to the sloop, climb aboard of it, and by a sudden attack overwhelm the men.

"He's crazy!" Hodge grated. "They will see him, and they will simply knock him back into the sea. They act as if they were lunatics—or drunk! Why don't they look this way?"

It was indeed singular, but neither of the men seemed

to have noticed the raft or heard the cries that came from it. Merriwell was a splendid swimmer, and in spite of his chilled condition and his hampering clothing, he moved through the water almost like a fish.

"Of course I couldn't have kept up with him!" Bart grumbled. "But I could have done my best. He can't overpower both of those men alone."

He held tightly to the shoes and the coat, and looked longingly after the swimmer, turning his eyes often to the sloop, that now, under the influence of a light breeze, was going along in a surprising fashion.

"And how did Inza come to be aboard of that sloop?"

Bart had not time to think of this before, but now the answer came quickly enough. Inza's clothing had clung to her, as she rushed on the deck, showing that her skirts were weighted with water. No doubt, she, too, had been hurled into the sea by the collision of the steamer with the barge, and this fishing-boat had in some manner picked her up.

"It's very queer, though, the way that fellow acted! She was afraid of him. But she is below, and he is now on deck. Likely enough he has her shut up in the cabin."

He beheld Merriwell lift himself slightly out of the water and send out a ringing call. But the men on deck did not stir. And the sloop sailed on.

"The scoundrels!" Bart hissed, through his white teeth. "I should like to knock their heads together. They re-

fuse to hear him. They are carrying Inza away, and they do not intend that any one shall come aboard. And this within the very shadows of New York City!"

The sloop heeled over under the breeze and increased her speed. Merriwell was palpably losing ground. Bart heard him call again and again, with the same result, and then Bart also lifted his voice.

The result was the same. The sloop moved straight on. At last he saw Merriwell turn about and swim again toward the raft, when it became evident that he could not overtake the sloop.

"That is enough to kill Merry!" he thought sympathizingly. "And Inza saw us, too! I wonder what she thinks?"

Slowly and with seeming weariness Merriwell came back toward the raft. Bart lifted himself as high as he could to mark the spot where the raft lay tossing. When lifted on the crest of a wave, Merriwell came plainly in sight; but when either Frank or the raft slipped down the glassy surface of those big, green rollers, he seemed to sink into the sea.

"I'm afraid he is going to have a hard pull! He must be tired out."

He shook his fist at the sloop. It was growing smaller and smaller. A haze was again creeping over the sea.

"My God! What if the fog should settle down again and keep Merry from finding the raft?"

Bart shuddered at the thought. But Merriwell was so

strong a swimmer that Bart's hopes rose again almost immediately. There were indications that the fog was once more descending, but Merriwell was now swimming straight toward the raft with a bold, firm stroke, and with considerable speed.

"Right here, old man!" Bart encouragingly called.

"I'm coming!" Merriwell shouted, and his tones did not show exhausting fatigue.

Then he swam up to the raft, and Bart helped him to climb upon it.

"What was the matter with those scoundrels?"

"Deaf!"

"What?"

"Deaf as posts, both of them!" Merriwell explained, resting on the boards and panting from his exertions. "They didn't look this way simply because they didn't hear us. I'm sure of that, from the way they acted. I began to think so when I told you to hang to the raft. I believed that if I could overtake the sloop, and could climb aboard and make myself known, or knock them down, as my intention was, I could then release Inza and sail the sloop over here and get you. But I couldn't swim fast enough."

"You went through the water like a fish!"

"But the sloop went faster. If that breeze hadn't sprung up, I think I could have made it."

"And what are they doing with Inza?"

"I don't know. But I'm glad of one thing. She isn't dead."

"Deaf!" muttered Bart. "Deaf as posts! Well, that does make the thing a bit clearer."

The reaction from the tremendous exertions which Merriwell had put forth made itself felt now. The excitement having passed, he felt almost exhausted. He climbed up as high as he could on the boards, and Bart, who was terribly benumbed and chilled from long exposure to the cold water, held him thus while he rested.

"It was too much for you, old man!" he said consolingly.

"I had to try it!" was Merriwell's answer.

"The fog is shutting down again," said Bart.

"But it won't stay down. The sea looked red out toward the west. I think it will clear away to-night."

He was in no mood to say more.. And the raft drifted on, while the gray fog settled round them, and its chill and gloominess seemed to go to their very hearts.

But as Merriwell had predicted, the fog lifted again, and at the end of another hour of an experience as terrible as either had ever been called to undergo, the gray bank again swung up toward the sky. The sun was sinking redly into the sea, and night was at hand—and what night might mean in their weakened and chilled condition, adrift on the great ocean toward which they seemed to be so resistlessly borne, they dared not think.

"The sloop!" Bart cried, rousing himself.

Merriwell lifted himself and looked. It was the sloop, sure enough. A little to the southward of east, with its dingy sails furled and their bulging shapes turned to great lumps of gold, with the mast standing out in dark tracery against the red skyline, lay the fishing-sloop.

"It's the same!" Merry exclaimed.

"Sure! There can't be any doubt about it."

"And she has cast anchor."

"What does that mean?"

"She is a fishing-sloop, and I've an idea we must be on the fishing-grounds off the Jersey or New York coast. There is no other explanation. She is out here on a fishing-trip."

"And Inza?"

"We'll have to wait for her to clear that mystery away."

"What will we do? If those fellows are deaf, there is no use in shouting."

"We are drifting toward her, you see. We'll be alongside before dark, if this continues."

"Then we'll get on board of her!"

"And we'll find out a few things, if we have to knock those fellows on the head."

The thought was so exhilarating that the warm blood was again driven through their veins, and the numbness seemed in a measure to go out of their chilled bodies. Nothing is so reviving as hope. And hope was theirs again. The raft drifted so slowly and Bart was so eager

that he wanted to leap into the sea and swim to the vessel.

"Let us save our strength," was Merriwell's advice. "We are going straight there. We will probably need all the strength we have."

"I see only one man. He is pottering about near the cabin."

"The other is aboard somewhere. And you noticed that dog? If he puts up a fight, too, I've an idea that he will be worse than either of the men."

The progress of the little raft was tantalizingly slow, but it moved steadily, and after the sun had set and while the darkness was gathering on that great expanse of water, it swung close in under the stern of the sloop. Not a sound was heard aboard of her as she lazily lifted and rolled on the heaving swell.

Frank took his shoes in one hand, but thought it not well to burden himself with the extra coat.

"Now!" he whispered. "Let the raft go. We can cut that boat loose if we have to trust to the sea again. Follow me!"

Then he slipped silently into the sea, Hodge imitating his example. Softly swimming round to the bow, Frank got hold of a chain that ran down from the bowsprit.

"Here," he softly whispered. "Lay hold of this, and come right up after me."

"I'll be there!" Hodge whispered back.

Then, hampered by the shoes, Merry climbed slowly

aboard, and Bart swung up after him. Together they dropped to the deck, and crouched low, with the water running in rivulets from their clothing.

Frank felt softly about, and his hands fell on a club-like maul which fishermen use for stunning the large fish they catch. There was nothing else near in the shape of a weapon. He passed the maul to Bart, and clutched one of the shoes as a club in his right hand.

"Good luck!" he softly whispered. "How are you?"

Hodge was chilled to the bone, and his teeth were fairly chattering.

"I'm all right. A bit chilly, but I guess things will be warm enough for me in a few minutes. I'm ready. Go on!"

A dark form was standing beside the cuddy. But for his certainty that the men were deaf, or nearly so, Merriwell would not have indulged in even this whispered conversation. He crept now toward this man, with Hodge crawling at his heels, and when near enough, leaped on the man with a sudden and disconcerting pounce.

Though the surprise must have been great, the man, who was large and strong, wheeled round to resist the attack, and the large dog, which had before been seen, sprang up from the deck and flew at Merriwell's throat. The ready club in the hands of Bart Hodge tumbled the dog over with a howl, and Merry and the big fisherman began to struggle in the growing darkness for the mastery.

To and fro on the deck they reeled. The dog leaped up again and tried to come to the assistance of its master, but turned upon Hodge when he struck at it again with the maul. Its eyes seemed balls of green fire in the gloom, and the hoarse growl that came from deep down in its throat was anything but pleasant to hear.

But Bart Hodge met its onset with a stout heart, raining his blows with such swiftness and precision that it dropped to the deck. Then he hurried to the assistance of Merriwell. But Frank was already the victor. Though the man had the strength of an ox, he had not Merriwell's science and skill in fighting, and Frank had not only knocked the breath out of him, but had hurled him to the deck.

"That rope, Bart! It is right here. I tripped over it. Tie him!"

A cry followed this—a cry from Inza. She rushed out of the cuddy door, and after her sprang a man with a lighted lantern.

Hodge faced toward this man, intending to fell him with the club.

"Frank! Frank!" Inza cried. "I knew you would come, Frank!"

Then she noticed the uplifted club.

"Don't strike him, Bart!"

She threw herself between Hodge and the man with the lantern. Merriwell was still holding down the man he had conquered.

"What is it?" he questioned, looking up and trying to read Inza's meaning by the light of the lantern.

"The men are deaf!" said Inza. "They rescued me from a piece of boat, to which I clung after the collision!"

The man with the lantern seemed about to spring upon Frank in spite of Hodge's threatening club. Inza touched him on the arm.

"Friends!" she screamed, in an endeavor to make him hear.

CHAPTER XXIV.

INZA'S STORY.

The man did not hear Inza, but he felt the touch, and, turning quickly about, caught something of her meaning in her manner. The deaf are wonderfully quick in such things. He made a horrible grimace and pointed at Merriwell. Again she laid a hand restrainingly on his shoulder.

"Let the man up, Frank," she urged. "The fellows are harmless enough, but they are as deaf as adders!"

"Look out for the dog!" Frank warned.

The dog, which had crawled away in a seemingly dying condition, had struggled again to its feet and appeared to be meditating another attack on Hodge.

"I've got an eye on him," Hodge called back. "Look out for your man!"

Merriwell released the fellow he had overthrown, and the man climbed dazedly and sullenly to his feet. Inza hurried toward him, shrieking and making motions with her hands. The man did not understand her. It began to seem that both of them contemplated an attack on Bart and Merry.

"Wait a minute!" she cried. "Don't strike them, Frank, Bart, if you can help it!"

"I think I'm awake," growled Hodge, as if he wanted to pinch himself to make sure of it.

The scene was certainly a strange one—as strange as if taken from a comic opera. The fishing-sloop rocking on the long swell, the dog cowed and uncertain, one deaf man doubtingly flashing the lantern in the face of Bart Hodge, and the other swaying unsteadily on his feet, as if he contemplated making a blind rush at Merriwell. In less than a minute Inza reappeared from the cuddy. She held in her hand a piece of paper on which she had hastily written some explanatory sentences. This she thrust beneath the nose of the man who held the lantern.

The effect was magical. The lantern came down, something that sounded like an attempt at words gurgled in his throat, and he made a signal to the other fisherman, whose attitude also changed instantly.

"It's all right now!" Inza laughed, though the laugh sounded a bit hysterical.

"Well, I'm glad that it is!" said Merriwell. "But an explanation would be comfortable."

"These men rescued me from the piece of broken boat to which I was clinging," Inza hastily explained. "I was knocked overboard by the collision. They are fishermen, and are now anchored on their fishing-grounds."

"So I see. But what about one of them chasing you, when you ran out of the cuddy this afternoon? You tried to jump overboard!"

"The men both thought me deranged by what I had passed through, and I suppose I may have acted strange. I saw you and Bart on the raft, and I tried to make the men see you. But they thought I was going to jump overboard, and I was carried bodily into the cuddy and locked in. I didn't know at the time that they could read writing, or I should have tried that; though I was kept locked in the cuddy so long that it would have done no good!"

Then she began to motion to the men; and one of the fellows came toward Bart in a sheepish way and held out a hand. Bart hesitated about taking it, fearing a trick; but the man's intentions were honest. Having made this advance, the way to an understanding was so fully paved that within less than ten minutes thereafter both Frank and Hodge, having wrung out their clothing in a contracted place below deck, were warming themselves and trying to get dry by the cuddy stove, while Inza was rattling on with the story of her adventures.

"I really don't know yet whether I am awake or dreaming!" said Bart. "This about knocks everything I have ever seen!"

"Just fishermen," said Inza. "They would have picked you up, no doubt, if they had seen you—they couldn't hear you; or if I had been able to make them see you. It must have been an hour or more after that when I found that they had writing-material in the little desk over there, and I wrote them a note. But the fog was

so thick then that it was no use for them to make a search."

"Why didn't they run back to New York with you?"

"Simply because they thought they had done their duty by me, and that it would pay them better to come out to the fishing-grounds and take me in on their return. I promised them money, but——"

She laughingly held up a little purse.

"I had just ten cents in that, and you see I couldn't convince them of the fabulous wealth of my father and my friends by exhibiting that. They said they would take me when they went in, and I could not get anything else out of them."

"Perhaps a little money—as much or more than they can make out of this fishing-trip—will induce them to take us right in. That is, as soon as the wind rises. We're not only anchored, but we're becalmed now."

Frank was thinking of Elsie and of the others who had been on the *Merry Seas*. His heart was aching with anxiety. Bart and Inza were scarcely less distressed.

The cabin or "cuddy," which had been surrendered to them by the fishermen who were now outside, was a diminutive place, smelling unpleasantly of fish and burnt grease. On two sides were bunks. Near the center was the rusty stove about which the three friends were gathered. Its heat caused their wet clothing to emit a cloud of steam. At one side was the writing-desk, fashioned by clumsy hands, and scattered about was a miscellane-

ous assortment of odds and ends, consisting of sea-boots and oilskin coats, nets, and fishing-tackle.

"Not a ladies' parlor," Inza admitted, glancing about. "But I tell you I was glad to get into it."

"And you don't know anything about the people on the *Merry Seas?*" Frank asked.

A look of pain swept across the dark, handsome face.

"Not a thing! I am worried to death about all of them, especially father. But I hope for the best. If any others went overboard, the tug was right there to pick them up, and we can believe, until we know otherwise, that it did. We have been so very fortunate ourselves!"

"More than fortunate!" Merry observed, with a thankful heart. "Now, if we can only get to the city without delay! Call in the fishermen and perhaps an offer of money can do something. If not, we can capture the sloop and take it in ourselves!"

"But there is no breeze," Bart reminded.

"That is so. But call in the fishermen. We may get some opinions out of them."

Jabez and Peleg Slocum, the deaf-mute owners of the fishing-sloop *Sarah Jane*, of Sea Cove, New Jersey, were what one might call "queer ducks"; a thing not so much to be wondered at when the fact that they had been deaf and dumb from infancy is taken into consideration, with the further fact that the greater part of their fifty odd years had been spent in the lonely and precarious calling

of Atlantic fishermen. They were rough and gnarled and cross-grained, like the sloop whose deck they trod; yet, in spite of all, like that same sloop, they had some good qualities.

To them fishing was the end and aim of existence. Hence, as soon as Merriwell, with the aid of pencil and paper, began to talk of being taken straight to New York, the fishermen shook their heads. They had work to do out there on the fishing-banks. It was probable they reasoned that it was not their fault that these young people had fallen in their way. They had dutifully rescued them from watery graves—or, in the case of Hodge and Merriwell—had permitted them to rescue themselves. And thus, whatever obligation they may have been under as fellow human beings had been fully discharged. They did not want Merriwell's money—and they certainly did not desire to run to New York. It was not their habit to visit New York. Sea Cove was their home, and, whenever they pulled up their rusty anchor for a run from the banks, they returned to Sea Cove invariably, unless blown out of their latitutde by a storm, as sometimes happened.

Finally one of them wrote:

"See in morning."

"And now we'll have something to eat!" Inza declared. "Both of you are famished. You are getting thawed out and dry, and if your stomachs are strong enough to stand the odor of things, I'll go ahead and get

some supper for you. I know where everything is in the—what do you call it?—locker? Peleg, that's the taller one, showed me."

"Peleg must be sweet on you," remarked Frank, laughing.

She picked up a "spider" and shook it at him.

"Don't trouble the cook, Mr. Merriwell, if you expect to get anything to eat!"

"I was just going to remark that I admired his taste. He is a man of most excellent judgment!"

"How is your taste, Mr. Hodge?" Inza calmly queried. "Do you think you can eat fish?"

"I could eat a whale. I'll gobble up this fish-basket pretty soon if you don't hurry and serve something."

"Very well. Fish-baskets on toast. There are fish in a box back there. And there are crackers in this box. And over there I found some pretty nice canned goods."

Merriwell smiled. Inza's manner was like a break of sunshine.

"Your talk makes me simply ravenous."

That they were ravenous they showed when they fell to on the supper which Inza prepared as best she could from the materials available. There were many things that might have been improved. They might have gone out on the deck, for one thing, but the wet fog had come down again, with a chill that went to the bones—a chill

that was simply horrible to Frank and Bart in the damp condition in which their clothing still remained.

The fishermen did not seem to mind the fog, however, but walked the deck and smoked, garbed in oilskins and sou'westers. They talked, too, by signaling to each other with their hands. Merry, Hodge, and Inza sat up until a late hour, going over and over again all the points of the day's experience, with the many conjectures and unanswerable questions which grew out of it.

The fact that the sloop belonged in Sea Cove, the village near which, according to the newspaper report, Barney Mulloy was killed, was a matter of intense interest, even though the fishermen could in no wise enlighten them on the subject of Barney's murder. Frank continued to hope that a breeze would spring up, and that he could induce the Slocums, by a liberal money offer, to set him and his friends ashore at the nearest point without delay. In the event of a refusal, the temptation to take the vessel in himself would have been strong, but he knew that such a course would hardly do in these modern days. It smacked too much of piracy. Money was the lever he hoped to use, and when the breeze came he intended to make the lever sufficiently strong to move even these placid souls.

But the breeze did not come. The fog seemed to grow thicker and damper. At length weariness overcame the whole party. Then Inza was left in full possession of the cuddy, while Hodge and Frank crept into

a narrow sleeping-place forward which Jabez Slocum pointed out to them. As for the fishermen themselves, they seemed content to stretch out under a tarpaulin on deck; and the *Sarah Jane,* with lights set to show her position, though they could not have been seen a dozen feet distant, rocked sleepily in the fog at the end of her cable.

When morning dawned, the fog rolled away under the influence of a brilliant sun, showing an attractive sight. Other fishing-boats, big and little, were rising and falling on the swell. To the northward a steamer, outward bound, trailed from her triple funnels banners of black smoke. From the southward a "fruiter," as the vessels bringing fruit from the West Indies are called, came bravely up the coast. There were other vessels—schooners, barks, sloops, and the coast itself was visible as a blue line. Finally, one of the Slocum brothers came to Merriwell and held out a scrap of paper. Frank glanced at it, and read, in an almost illegible scrawl: "Sea Cove."

"They will take us to Sea Cove!" Inza explained.

"New York City," Merry wrote.

The deaf-mate shook his head and again pointed to the name "Sea Cove."

"What's the odds?" said Bart. "There is a railway there, and no doubt boats running to New York. And then it will give us an opportunity to investigate the

murder of poor Barney a little. By to-night we can be in New York, if all goes well!"

"Put us aboard the fruiter or some steamer," Frank again wrote.

But the man shook his head.

"It is Sea Cove or nothing," said Inza. "And he would be glad, I think, to have it nothing."

"Sea Cove it is, then," Frank agreed.

But the promise was productive of no immediate good. There was no breeze, and, as the *Sarah Jane* was on the shallow banks, far out of the route of the steamers, there was nothing to do but to cultivate patience and wait. At Frank's urging, Peleg set a signal from the masthead, but it drew no vessel near them.

The Slocums seemed glad that they were not to be called on to sail at once for land, and they proceeded to get out long hand-lines and fish over the sides of the sloop. Wherever they went they were followed by their dog, that limped from the blows Bart had given it. The dog would not make friends with the newcomers, but showed its teeth in a threatening way whenever Bart or Frank came near. Finally Merriwell and his friends also engaged in the fishing to kill time, and with considerable success. Thus the day wore wearily along until well into the afternoon.

"A breeze!" Frank gleefully exclaimed at last, holding up a hand. "The wind is coming! I feel that if this old

boat doesn't get a move on soon, I shall have to jump overboard and swim ashore."

"Well, I should hope you would take me on your back!" Inza observed, her voice thrilled with the thought that the long-expected breeze was actually coming. "I'm as frantic as any one can be to put foot on land and learn what has happened to our friends and to father!"

The Slocums were ready to go home now, and as the breeze rapidly increased in strength and gave evidence of having come to stay, they speedily got the *Sarah Jane* under way, with the help of Frank and Bart, and stood off for the Jersey shore. Frank was now perfectly willing that they should run to Sea Cove direct, for a little thought and some questions put to the Slocums had shown him that he could reach New York from there by wire, and by rail from a point near-by, and he could take a little time to investigate the Barney Mulloy affair.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GHOST OF BARNEY MULLOY.

"Another calm!" Bart growled, in disgust. Night was approaching, and the *Sarah Jane* lay becalmed a mile from shore and nearly ten miles from Sea Cove. The shore, high and sandy, was plainly visible, with pretty cottages among some trees a short distance back from the edge of the water. The Slocums had a good glass, which brought all this out with much distinctness.

"If we could just draw the land near enough with that glass to jump ashore!" Inza sighed.

"I've a plan almost as good," said Frank.

This plan was to have the Slocums set them ashore in the dory. By a little questioning in writing, they learned from the fishermen that the group of cottages was Glen Springs, and that there was a telegraph-office there and a daily visit by a small steamer from New York, but no railway. This increased their anxiety to be set ashore at Glen Springs, for by putting themselves in telegraphic communication with New York they could ascertain without delay of the fate of the *Merry Seas* and of her passengers.

For a small financial consideration the Slocums were willing to put Merriwell and his friends ashore in the

dory; which was done by Peleg, who pulled a good, strong stroke, and sent the clumsy boat through the water at a surprising rate of speed.

"Attack the telegraph-office first," Inza suggested. A telegram to New York brought this answer:

"*Merry Seas* towed in considerably injured. Missing are Frank Merriwell, Bart Hodge, Inza Burrage. Other passengers landed safely. Bernard Burrage at Hotel Imperial."

Bart threw up his cap. Merriwell was writing another message, directed to Bernard Burrage, assuring him of the safety of Inza and asking that this fact and the fact that he and Bart were also safe be communicated at once to their friends at the hotel and elsewhere.

"That will fix things up all right," he remarked, as the operator began to click off the message. "Of course, we can't know all the particulars until later; but it is enough to know that none of our friends are lost, and to be able to let them know that we are all right."

"You bet!" Bart cried. "This is great! I was mighty anxious, I tell you."

"And I was simply crazy!" Inza exclaimed.

The relief to their feelings was so great that the hardships of their recent experience seemed to be at once forgotten, and they became almost happy. They could not be quite happy, for the news of the murder of Barney Mulloy still cast its shadow.

"When does the next boat leave for New York?" Frank asked of the operator.

"To-morrow noon."

"We can drive through to Sea Cove?"

"Yes."

"And when does a train leave Sea Cove?"

"To-morrow at six-forty-five and ten-thirty."

As they were very tired, it was decided, therefore, that they would remain in Glen Springs until early the next morning, when they would drive to Sea Cove, make inquiries there about Barney, and take the ten-thirty train. The hotel at Glen Springs was small, but it looked clean and inviting.

"What do you know about the murder of a young Irishman named Barney Mulloy, by tramps near Sea Cove, day before yesterday?" Merry inquired.

"Only what the papers said," was the operator's answer.

"And no one else in the village can tell us?"

"I think not."

The hotel was in the suburbs, having a view of the sea, and was really a summer hotel more than anything else. It had very few guests as yet. From it a number of messages were sent to New York and received from there by our friends that evening—messages from Elsie and Mr. Burrage, and from other members of the party that had been on the *Merry Seas*.

Though fairly tired out by his exhausting experiences, from which the long hours on the fishing-sloop had not enabled him to recuperate, Frank Merriwell was not able to sleep until a late hour. His thoughts were of Barney Mulloy. In memory he traveled the round of the Fardale days. The death of Mulloy in that terrible manner had upset him more than he had realized. He had not felt it so much during his exciting experiences and while weighted down with anxiety concerning the fate of the *Merry Seas.*

"I just can't sleep!" he muttered, seating himself at last by a window and looking out toward the sea, along a greensward on which the moonlight fell lovingly. "Poor Barney! Perhaps I ought to have gone on to Sea Cove and begun my investigations at once. But Inza was so tired. She has held up bravely, dear girl, through it all, but this evening she looked ready to drop. I felt that we ought not to go on until she was rested. She will sleep well now, since she knows that her father is safe."

Something dark moved among the shadows, and a familiar form approached. Merriwell started up with a low cry:

"Barney Mulloy!"

He saw the young Irishman as plainly as he had ever seen him. The face, though, was white and bloodless. The ghostly figure moved with a heavy step, coming straight up the walk toward the building. Frank sat rooted to his chair. In the shadow of the piazza the

figure seemed to turn, and was then lost to view. Merriwell threw up the window.

"Barney!" he softly called. "Barney—Barney Mulloy!"

The only answer that came back was a slow and heavy tread, that seemed to come from a corridor opening out upon the walk along which Barney had come.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

The footsteps sounded with great distinctness. Merriwell threw open the door of his room leading out into this corridor. The light of the lamp flooded the corridor, and he was able to view it from end to end. He could have sworn that the footsteps were just beyond his door. But the corridor was absolutely empty. And the footsteps had ceased.

Frank whistled softly to himself. He was not superstitious, but this was rather shaking to the nerves. He hurried back to the window and looked out upon the walk and down the moon-lighted sward. No sound came, save the dashing of the surf. He leaped through the open window and proceeded to inspect the grounds in that vicinity. The ghostly form had vanished.

"Hodge!" he called. "Hodge! Come out here."

Hodge, who occupied an adjacent room, and who had been asleep, threw up a window and looked out.

"Yes," he said. "As soon as I can slip into my clothes. What is it, Merry?"

"I don't know," Frank confessed. "I wish I did know."

"Of course, there are no such things as ghosts," he declared, when Bart joined him. "But if ever a man saw one, I did just now—the ghost of Barney Mulloy!"

Hodge stared at his friend as if wondering if Frank's mind was not affected.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I have said to you. I saw an apparition that resembled Barney Mulloy. And I not only saw it, but I heard it. It came right along here, and turned in there, and then I heard it in the corridor. I threw open the corridor door before any one could have got out of there, and the corridor was empty!"

"You must have been dreaming!"

"Not a bit of it, Bart. I hadn't gone to bed. I haven't been even a bit sleepy. I was sitting at my window, and I saw it as plainly as I see you."

"You certainly must have been dreaming, Merry!" Bart insisted. "Have you looked all about?"

"Everywwhere."

Bart walked over to the door which opened from the corridor on the lawn. It was not locked.

"It couldn't have been Barney, of course; but whoever it was went through here into the corridor."

"And how did he get out of the corridor?"

"Walked on through into the office."

"The office is closed. The landlord and all the servants retired long ago."

"Well, it couldn't have been a ghost!"

"I am wondering if it could have been Barney himself?"

"He was—attacked near Sea Cove, not here!"

"I am going to rout out the landlord," Merriwell declared. "Perhaps he can throw some light on the subject."

"He told you, when you inquired, that he had heard nothing except what was in the papers."

"But he may be able to help us to clear away this mystery."

When summoned, the landlord came down into the little office looking very sleepy, very stupid, and somewhat angry. Merriwell told what he had seen and heard, and repeated the newspaper story about the murder of Barney.

"Well, that was at Sea Cove," was the answer. "Ghosts always come back to the place where the person was killed. Why should it come here? I don't like this. If you tell it, it will give my house a bad name. No one wants to board in a haunted house, and it will ruin my summer's business."

"But I thought you might help us to an explanation," Frank insisted.

The sleepy and stupid look had passed away. The

landlord had once been a seafaring man, and he was a bit superstitious. Still, he was not willing to acknowledge that Frank had beheld something supernatural. He would not deny its possibility, but repeated over and over his belief that ghosts always return to the place of the murder and to no other place, and that the repetition of the story would drive away his summer boarders.

"I tell him he was just dreaming," said Bart.

"Sure!" with a look of relief. "Of course, he was dreaming. There's been nobody in Glen Springs looking like the chap you describe, and I'm sure that nobody has been walking in that corridor, 'less it was burglars."

So Frank went back to his room, accompanied by Bart. He knew that he had not been asleep, though, and he felt sure that he had really seen and heard something, and was not the victim of a hallucination. Merriwell sat down again by the open window, and Bart dropped into a chair by his side.

"If the thing comes again, we'll capture it!" said Hodge. "Somebody may be playing ghost, just to scare us. I have heard——"

He did not complete the sentence, for he really heard something at the moment that stilled the words on his lips and drove the blood out of his face.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp!

The sounds came unmistakably from the corridor.

'There it is again!" Frank exclaimed.

Bart leaped toward the door and quickly threw it open.

The lamplight again streamed out into the corridor. But the sounds had ceased, and the corridor was empty. Hodge stared down the corridor in stupid bewilderment.

"Of all the strange things!" he gasped.

"That is the strangest!" Merriwell added. "You heard it for yourself then!"

Bart walked out into the corridor, peered out of doors through the glass set in the side door, and opened the door leading into the deserted office. There was nothing to be seen. When he came back, his face was beaded with moisture.

"Merry, I wish you'd tell me the meaning of that!"

"I wish you would tell me, Bart! You thought I was dreaming, or fancied that I saw and heard something. You see now that you were mistaken."

"Unless I am dreaming myself!"

"You are perfectly wide-awake, Hodge, and so am I! There is a mystery here."

"Never knew anything like it," mopping his face. "Whew! It brings the cold sweat out on me!"

He dropped down into the chair by the window, leaving the corridor door open. Nothing further was heard.

"Ghosts don't like a bright light!" Merry reminded, smiling grimly. Bart got up, closed the door, and sat down again.

Then his hair seemed to stand upright on his head. Out of the shadow of the building, near one of the angles, walked the ghostly form which Merriwell had beheld.

Hodge was unable to speak at first. Merry noticed his manner and the look in his staring eyes, and sprang to the window. As he did so, the ghostly form vanished into the shadow, and again those steps were heard in the corridor.

"If Barney is dead, that was his spirit, sure enough!" Hodge whispered, in an awed way.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp!

The steps echoed in the corridor. Even Merriwell's stout heart was assailed by a feeling that was like superstitious dread.

"It looked just like him!"

"The very picture of him, only white-faced, as if he had just come out of the grave!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp! sounded the steps in the corridor.

"Open the door, Merry, for God's sake!" Hodge gasped, as if the words choked him. "See if there isn't something in the corridor! There must be!"

Merriwell stepped to the door and flung it open. Instantly the sounds ceased.

"Somebody is playing a joke on us, I believe!" Bart declared, and anger came to drive out the superstitious feeling that had shaken him. "I'm going to take a look round the house myself, and if I find anybody——"

"I'll go with you!" Merry exclaimed, and both leaped through the open window.

They circled round the house, looked down the paths

and out over the sward on which the moonlight fell, but not a form could they see.

"Give it up!" Hodge admitted. "I don't know what to think."

They came back to the window, and again they heard the footsteps in the corridor. Hodge went through the window at a flying leap and hurled open the corridor door, only to again find silence and blankness.

"The place is haunted!" he exclaimed.

"But there are no such things as ghosts!"

"I know it. Of course, there can't be—that's what I have always believed. I have always fancied that stories of ghosts were lies and foolishness, and I'm not ready to back water on that belief. But I can't understand this business."

"Nor I."

"Shall we call the landlord again?"

"What good will it do?"

"Shall we wake Inza?"

"And rob her of her rest and fill her with anxiety? No, let her sleep. She needs it."

"Well, I shall not be able to sleep any more to-night."

"And it looked just like Barney!" Frank declared.

"His very image!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PHANTOM AGAIN.

Both Merriwell and Hodge were so sure they had seen something that they again let themselves out through the window and made a search of the grounds. The result was the same. Not a moving form was to be seen. But as they returned toward the room, they once more heard those mysterious footsteps.

"Stop!"

Frank laid a hand on Bart's arm, and both stood still and listened.

"Where does that seem to be?"

"Merry, that's coming from your room! The thing is in your room!"

Hodge's voice shook, in spite of himself.

Frank dashed toward the open window. But before he could reach it, the sounds ceased. When he looked in, the room was empty. The light was shining, and the door leading to the corridor was closed.

"No one could have got out of that room without our knowing it!" Merriwell whispered. Hodge had reached his side, and both were staring into the room.

"Of course not. The thing is impossible."

"And yet those footsteps sounded right here."

"Let's go in and take another look into the corridor."

For answer Merry drew Bart back into the shadows by the window.

"Keep still right here a little while. Perhaps the—the thing will return. If some one is playing us a trick, we may capture him."

"I should like to lay my hands on the villain!" Bart hissed. Though they stood there in utter silence for five minutes, the sounds did not come again.

"Of course, there is some rational explanation of this," Merriwell declared, as they again approached the window. "There must be! It is the wildest nonsense to think otherwise."

"Well, I wish that rational explanation would hurry this way. I'm ready for it, old man! This thing is shaking my nerves all to pieces."

"I didn't know you were troubled with nerves! Nerves are for hysterical girls and old women!"

"Well, I've got 'em now! as the drunken man said when he began to see snakes. I haven't any doubt about it."

Hodge so seldom indulged in a joke, that Merry looked surprised. They had reentered the room, and he glanced at his friend in wonder.

"Likely that—thing will begin to walk again pretty soon," said Frank, after they had remained another minute or so in a listening attitude. "You sit here and watch by this window, while I slip into the corridor."

Hodge obediently dropped into the chair, and Merriwell let himself into the corridor. He closed the door after him, so that if any one approached or entered the corridor that person could not see him, and began his vigil.

The silence was so great that he could hear his watch ticking away in his pocket. It seemed strange that it should run after its salt-water ducking, but he reasoned that probably the works were not touched by the salt water. His clothing had dried long ago, but he felt the need of a change. However, he had taken a bath since reaching the hotel, and so was in a measure comfortable.

There was a great deal to think of as he stood there in the gloom, but the minutes dragged along like weeks. This sort of vigil was rather nerve-trying. He was sure, now that he had time to think about it, that some very little thing might account for the mystery. He began to think that the footsteps had probably been made by some servant or by a somnambulist. Sounds are very deceptive as to direction, as he more than once had discovered. The footsteps might have been at some distance from the corridor.

"But that doesn't explain what I saw and what Bart saw!" he muttered. "I might have thought my eyes deceived me, but Bart saw it, too. That was either Barney Mulloy, or some one who looks marvelously like him. If it was really Barney, then the poor fellow is not dead! I sincerely hope we shall find out that he was not killed.

Perhaps the entire newspaper report was based on a mistake. The papers are full of errors."

The sounds did not come again, and when it seemed almost useless to wait longer for them, he returned to the room, where he found Bart watching silently by the window.

"Seen anything?" he asked.

"No. Heard anything?"

"Not a thing."

"I didn't suppose you had, or I should have heard it, too."

"It will probably not reappear to-night."

"Well, I'm not in love with ghosts, but I have been wild to have the thing pass along that walk again. It wouldn't get away from me this time! I've planned just what to do."

"What?"

"I can reach that walk in three jumps from this window, and it would take a lively ghost to get away from me. I was going right out there the first glimpse I got of it."

"Then you're not afraid of ghosts?" laughed Frank, for there was something amusing in his companion's manner.

"I might be, Merry, if there were any. But I've been thinking as I sat here. I know I saw something, and that something was a man. He didn't look so strong but that I could tumble him over easy enough. That

was my plan, and then we could see who it is. It couldn't have been Barney, for all it looked so much like him."

As he spoke, he saw the ghostly figure again, but much farther away. Its face was turned toward the window, and the moonlight revealed it plainly. Beyond all question, it was the face of Barney Mulloy!

Bart went through the open window at a bound.

"Barney!" he called. "Barney Mulloy!"

The mysterious figure drew quickly back into the shrubbery and disappeared. Merriwell sprang through the open window after Hodge, and together they raced to the point where the figure had been seen. When they got there they could discover nothing.

"That was Barney Mulloy!" Merriwell asserted.

"Sure!"

"And he isn't dead!"

"Barney or his spirit!"

"It was Barney."

"Why didn't he stop when I called to him?"

"I don't know. There is a mystery here."

"Biggest one I ever struck, Merry! It knocks me silly."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MERRIWELL'S FRIENDS.

The time was well on toward morning before Merriwell and Hodge turned in to try to get some sleep. No more mysterious sounds or ghostly appearances had been heard or seen. The sun was scarcely up when they were aroused by a trampling of feet and the sounds of well-known voices in the corridor. A rap fell on Merry's door.

"Arise, ye sleepers, and wake—I mean, awake, ye sleepers, and rise!" shouted Harry Rattleton.

"Come out here and let me pull you out of bed!" grunted Bruce Browning.

"He is sleeping like the sleeper in the sleeper which runs over the sleeper and does not awaken the sleeper in the sleeper which——"

"You give us that sleepy feeling yourself, Danny!" Bink Stubbs grumbled.

Merry tumbled out of bed, unlocked the door, and thrust his head into the corridor. Before him were Bruce and Diamond, Rattleton and Dismal Jones, Bink and Danny, and through the half-open door leading into the office he also caught a glimpse of Elsie Bellwood and Bernard Burrage.

"Glad to see you!" he cried. "Where did you tumble from?"

Bart had his door open now, and began to ask questions.

"I'll be out in a minute," Frank promised, and began to dress with the speed of a lightning-change artist. A little later Merriwell's entire party gathered in the hotel office, for Inza had been awakened and joined them.

Mutual explanations flew thick and fast. Merriwell's friends, after being taken to New York, had shortly fallen in with a party of Yale students, mostly seniors, who had come down from New Haven on the steamer *Richard Peck,* and were on their way to view the new government fortifications at Sandy Hook, by special permission of General Merritt, commander of the Department of the East. This permission had been obtained by Lieutenant Andrew Bell, of the First United States Artillery, who had recently been detailed by the secretary of war as professor of military science in Yale College.

Merriwell's friends had been invited to join this company of students, that they might the more quickly reach their friends, and had been brought to Sandy Hook by the government steamer *General Meigs.* From Sandy Hook the steamer's large steam-launch had hurried them on to Glen Springs.

"And now you are going right back with us to Sandy Hook!" Elsie enthusiastically exclaimed.

Suddenly a silence fell on the jolly party, occasioned by the shadow that came over the face of Frank Merriwell.

"I can't go until we have settled the mystery of Barney Mulloy," he declared; and then gave a hurried account of what he and Bart had seen and heard.

"I hoped you wouldn't say nothin' about that!" grumbled the landlord, who had been until then an interested listener.

Up to that moment he had seemed pleased, though nervous, for it gratified him to have guests who were of sufficient importance to be brought to Glen Springs by the launch of a government steamer.

"This must be all nonsense, you know!" he declared. "And I can't have any such reports go out about my house. If it gits the reputation of being ha'nted, then good-by business. I won't have a guest set foot in the doorway all summer. I know these people who claim not to be superstitious. They ain't superstitious so long as other people sees things, but they git confoundedly so soon's they begin to see things themselves."

"You have seen things at sea that puzzled you?" Merry asked, knowing that he was making a center shot.

"Who said that I'd ever been to sea? And s'pose I have? I ain't worried people to death about it and broke up another man's business. There ain't a thing in this. This ain't out at sea, ye know!"

The landlord seemed to have the peculiar feeling that

only ghosts that sailed or walked the briny deep were worthy of consideration.

"Explain it, then!" Merriwell demanded. "You can make us feel that nothing strange happened last night if you will explain the thing."

"You was just dopey!" the captain argued. "Your nerves was shook up from bein' in the water so long, and the skeer of the collision."

Though there seemed no use to make an investigation, Merriwell began one immediately. He felt sure that Barney Mulloy was somewhere in Glen Springs.

"I know that I saw him!" was his persistent declaration.

"And heard him walk!" added Hodge. "I can swear to it."

"Yes. And though the thing is so strange, it makes me feel better, for I am sure now that Barney is not dead."

"But he looked like a ghost! Bart admitted. "I'm with you, though, to the end in this thing. We'll go to the bottom of it."

Questioning the people of the village yielded no better results. Everybody agreed that no person answering to the description of Barney Mulloy had been in Glen Springs. Some of them were even more nervous and indignant than the landlord, for almost the sole remunerative business of these people was the keeping of

summer boarders, and they feared that gruesome reports about the place would drive guests away.

"Mr. Hodge and I are coming back here to-night," Merriwell said to the landlord. "Perhaps we shall bring some of these friends with us. It seems useless to continue the investigation now, and I want, besides, to ask some questions at Sea Cove. The launch is all ready to return to Sandy Hook, and the officer in command says that his orders require him to return there without further delay. But we will come back to-night."

The landlord's face did not give the proposition an eager welcome, though one of his business tenets was never to turn a guest away.

So the launch steamed away to Sandy Hook, leaving Glen Springs and its strange and unsolved puzzle behind.

Frank only partly enjoyed the trip.

But for that seemingly impenetrable mystery, the trip to Sandy Hook, with the visit of inspection which followed, would have been jolly. However, there was so much to be happy and thankful for, anyway, that the spirits of the party partook largely of the brightness of the day.

The run of the speedy launch up the coast was pleasant, and at Sandy Hook they found their fellow students awaiting them, and were given a right royal welcome by Captain Isaac Heath, the officer in charge of the proving-grounds.

"Say, fellows, this is great!" Danny warbled, as Captain Heath escorted them to where the big guns were. "I always did like big guns!"

"You're such a big gun yourself!" sneered Bink, under his breath.

"Binky, if my brain caliber required no more than a number five hat, as yours does, I'd sing low about big guns!"

"Number five hat? Why——"

"This ten-inch breech-loading rifle takes a charge of one hundred and ten pounds of Dupont smokeless powder and a projectile weighing five hundred and seventy-five pounds," Captain Heath was explaining, as they stopped in front of the big seacoast defender.

"Say, they're going to fire it!" Bink gasped.

"Of course, you idiot! Did you think it was going to fire them?"

"Better stand on your tiptoes and stick cotton into your ears," Browning warned, as the big gun was quickly made ready for hurling its terrible projectile.

"Wh-what if the dinged old thing should bub-bub-burst?" Gamp anxiously asked.

"We should have to

> "'Ask of the winds, that far around
> With fragments strewed the sea!'"

was Danny's comforting answer.

Dismal and Rattleton retreated a step or two, as did

Elsie Bellwood. But Inza stood her ground as bravely as Merriwell himself.

Then, before more could be said, the big cannon boomed forth its volume of deafening sound, making the very walls shake. Danny tumbled backward, then picked himself up and felt over his person very carefully.

"Am I all here?" he anxiously queried.

All watched the direction in which the huge shot had been fired, but it fell miles away. Merriwell and a few others, provided with strong glasses, saw it drop into the sea. The captain was talking again.

"The instruments record an initial velocity of one thousand feet per second, with a pressure of twenty-four thousand pounds."

"I've been under greater pressure than that," Danny chirped.

"When you were shot?" Bink asked. "All guns, big and little, are under pressure when they are shot."

"I'll put your throat under pressure when we get away from here!" Bink threatened.

"This is a twelve-inch rifle, loaded with one hundred and thirty pounds of powder and a projectile of the same weight as the first."

The party had moved to a new point, and Captain Heath was again talking. Other guns were fired, after the discharge of this one; the last shot being sent from a twelve-inch rifle with a charge of four hundred and

seventy-five pounds of Dupont brown prismatic powder and a projectile weighing one thousand pounds.

The roar, the jar, and the vibration were like that of a miniature earthquake. Captain Heath's calm voice was heard again, after a short silence.

"The velocity was two thousand and eighty-eight feet per second, and the pressure four thousand pounds. This pressure is ten thousand pounds too high. The powder is too quick, and will be condemned."

After this there was an examination of the guns and carriages, with a lecture by Lieutenant Bell; an examination of the gun-lift battery and the hydraulic lifts, and the wonderful Buffington-Crozier disappearing-carriages, and a look over the site of the new artillery post to be known as Fort Hancock. Then luncheon was served.

In spite of the many interesting things which he had seen and to which he had listened, Merriwell could not get his thoughts away from Barney Mulloy. He had already obtained consent for the party to be taken on the launch to Sea Cove and Glen Springs at once, after luncheon. Thinking of these things and with his head full of the plans for discovering the secret of the happenings at Glen Springs, he walked round the works again, viewing the emplacements and the big guns, but with his thoughts far enough away from the things on which his eyes rested.

Suddenly he was attracted by a cry. It seemed to come from the air, and it made him think of the appari-

tion and the ghostly footsteps. But when he glanced up he saw Danny Griswold's head protruding from the muzzle of a large coast-defense cannon. Merriwell was astonished, though such a piece of recklessness was just like Danny. It was not that Frank feared any peril to Danny from the gun, but the officers and gunners would be indignant, no doubt, if they caught the little joker playing hide-and-seek in that way with one of their pets.

"I'll give him a scare," he thought. "He is getting altogether too fresh."

"Danny Griswold, that gun is loaded, and they are going to fire it!" Merry cried, with well-simulated fear.

Danny's red head came farther out, like the head of a tortoise issuing from its shell.

"Then I suppose I shall be able to get out of here!" Danny chirped. "I can't do it, unless I am shot out. I slipped in here easy enough, but I've grown, I guess, for I can't slip back."

"How did you get in there, anyway?"

"Climbed in."

"I'm afraid you will have to climb out."

A gunner came hurrying upon the scene.

"Wh-what?" he sputtered.

"Our little friend is in need of assistance. If he gets out of there he will never play cannon-ball again."

"If you will just fire me!" Danny begged, not a bit abashed.

The gunner was not at all willing that Danny's plight

should be discovered by an officer, so he quickly went to Danny's assistance, and "fired" him by bodily pulling him out of the cannon.

"Thanks!" chirped the little joker, as he dropped to the ground. "Bink says that I'm a small-caliber projectile, but I was quite big enough for that cannon. Say, do you fire men every day?"

The gunner could not suppress a grin.

"Men? Well, you're likely to get fired, young feller, if you monkey round these guns!" he declared.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MYSTERY CLEARED AWAY.

What news was obtainable at Sea Cove about Barney Mulloy was important, though somewhat unsatisfactory. Barney had been attacked by tramps and badly hurt, but not killed, though at first the report of his death had gone out. One of the tramps had been nearly killed in the fight, and Mulloy had disappeared.

"What became of him? Where did he go?" were Merriwell's questions.

"We didn't pay much attention to it," was the answer given by Merriwell's Sea Cove informant. "Likely he walked off, or went away on the boat or train. Easy enough to get out of this place."

With this meager information, Frank and his friends hurried back on the launch to Glen Springs.

"He isn't dead!" was Merry's cheerful declaration. "That must have been Barney that Bart and I saw."

"But the walking?" Hodge dubiously questioned.

"And why should he be in hiding?" Diamond demanded.

"Some men love darkness, because their deeds are evil," Dismal droned.

"Well, you may be sure that Barney's deeds were not evil," said Frank. "Barney is straight, and true blue."

Night was at hand when the launch cast anchor in the shallow harbor in front of Glen Springs and sent a boat ashore with Merry and the friends he had chosen for the vigil of the coming hours of darkness. The landlord of the little hotel was not pleased that they had returned for the purpose of capturing the "ghost," though he was beginning, as he confessed, to feel "creepy" about it himself.

"I was intendin' to set up and watch for it, if you hadn't come," he finally admitted.

No one answering to Barney's description had been seen in Glen Springs through the day. In fact, no stranger whatever had been seen in the place from the time the launch went away until it returned.

"It's mighty curious," Bart grimly observed.

"I have a feeling that we will learn to-night just what it is," said Merriwell.

Frank occupied his old room, and sat at the window with Hodge, while Diamond, Rattleton, and Bruce remained in the office. The doors leading to the corridor were at first closed. Merry looked at his watch after the lights were put out in the part of the building occupied by the landlord and his family.

"It ought to be coming around again pretty soon," Bart remarked, finding it impossible to escape a queer, uneasy feeling, anxious as he was to see the specter, and determined as he was to effect its capture if it again appeared.

As he said it, the sounds of those mysterious steps were again heard in the corridor, and they heard the occupants of the office fling open the door.

"You weren't walking in here?" Diamond demanded.

"Not on your life!" Bart answered.

"But we heard some one!"

"Of course you did, and so did we. And we heard it last night!"

Rattleton and Bruce came on through into Merriwell's room.

"Scrate Gott, this is enough to turn a man's hair white!" Rattleton sputtered.

"Did you think we were just jollying you about this?" Bart sharply asked.

"No, but——"

"You're likely to see the thing, as well as hear it," Hodge asserted.

The landlord, who had not retired, though making a pretense of so doing, tumbled down in much excitement, in response to Rattleton's summons.

"Did you see it, boys?" he gasped.

His face was white, and he was trembling. All the assumed bravery had gone out of him.

"Only heard it walking there in the hall," Frank answered.

The landlord gave a jump. He had forgotten that he was standing by the corridor door.

"Oh, you can't see anything!" Frank reminded. "That's

the trouble. We can hear the thing walking, but we can't see anything. Close the door, and we may be able to hear it again."

"Don't! don't!" the landlord pleaded.

"But I want you to hear it. Perhaps you can tell us what it is."

"There is never anything in the corridor," the landlord declared. "I can't set here if you shut that door."

"There he is again!" said Hodge, in the voice of one who expects to behold the supernatural and inexplicable and has steeled himself against unpleasant sensations. "There he comes! Barney, as sure as guns!"

The landlord dropped limply into a chair, and stared out through the open window in the direction indicated by Hodge's pointing finger. The others grouped round Merriwell and Bart.

"You see it?" Frank whispered.

"Let me out of this!" the landlord gurgled, though no hand was restraining him. "Booh-h-h! Let me out of this. Ah-h-h-h-h! It's a ghost, sure enough! Don't you see that white cloth on its head—a bloody white cloth?"

He seemed about to tumble over in a fit.

"He's coming this way!" Merry whispered. "Just keep still now, all of you!"

Rattleton seemed about to bolt from the place, though the others were bravely standing their ground.

"No ghost there!" said Browning. "That's a live man."

"It's Barney," Merry declared. "He is not dead. His head is tied up."

"But what makes the—him sneak along in that way?" Rattleton gasped. "Whee-giz, it makes my blood run cold! Ugh!"

"Just keep still, and we shall soon find out!" Frank sharply commanded, in a whisper.

The ghostly figure came slowly up the walk. Nearer and nearer it drew, walking as if it did not fear discovery at that late hour.

"There is another!" Rattleton whispered.

The figure of a woman came into view, hurrying rapidly along the path after Mulloy, and seeming to be in pursuit of him, though he appeared not to know it.

"Now!" Merry whispered. "Ready, Hodge—now!"

He leaped through the window, with Bart at his side. The ghostly figure was but a few yards away. Before it could turn in the direction of the sound they were halfway across the intervening space.

"Barney! Mulloy!" Frank called.

The figure uttered a cry, and started to run. But Frank's pace was too swift. Almost in the next instant his hand fell on the shoulder of the specter.

"Don't you know me, Barney? I'm Merriwell!"

The figure ceased its struggles.

"Hurroo! Is it yez for thrue, Merriwell? I t'ought it wor an officer thryin' to arrist me."

"Break loose and run, ye fool!" was squealed in a high, feminine voice. "Run, Barney, dear—run!"

"Niver!" Barney declared. "Niver will I run from a fri'nd loike Merriwell!"

"But you'll be put in jail! You'll be hung!" the woman shrieked, in a vain effort to stampede the Irish lad. "Them fellers is officers."

Bart had pushed up, so that Mulloy could recognize him.

"Save me frum her, Frankie!" Barney pleaded. "Wooooo! Begorra! She's crazier than wildcats!"

Then he whispered:

"The ould sinner wants to marry me. Think av thot! She's been hoidin' me frum the officers fer matrimoonial poorpuses. Take me away from her, Frankie, darlint! Oi've kilt a thramp, and I'm in peril av bein' hoong for it; but I'd rather be hoong than to marry such a cat as thot! Bad cess to her!"

"Gentlemen, the poor fellow is out of his head!" the woman purred, modulating that shrieking voice. "His head has been hurt, and he don't know nothin' that he's talkin' 'bout."

Barney clung to Merriwell and Hodge as if he feared the woman would drag him bodily away from these friends.

"Oi suppose thot she may be able to foorce me into marryin' her," he moaned. "Oi kilt a thramp, and Oi wor hidin' frum the officers—may the divil floy away wid thim—and Oi sneaked intil her house, d'ye moind, and hid me loike a fool under her bed. The craythe had been lookin' under thot bed for forty years to foind a man! And whin she let her ould oyes loight on me, she pulled me out av there; an' she's been kapin' me and scarin' me intil fits and hoidin' me from the officers iver since—and, bad cess to her, nixt wake she wor goin' to marry me."

"Why did you sneak round the hotel and along the paths in that queer way?" Frank asked, after the vinegary-visaged and matrimonially inclined female had departed in despair and disgust, and he had Barney alone. "That still puzzles me. We heard that you had been killed by those tramps, and you looked and acted enough like a ghost to be one!"

"A ghost, is it?" said Barney, glancing about as if he did not like even the thought. "Thot ould witch wor kapin' me hid away from the officers in thot wee bit av a house roight behind the three over there, and all the ixercoise Oi could git wor whin Oi could shlip out av noights and walk round and swally a brith av fresh air. Oi t'ought Oi had kilt the thramp and thot the officers wor watchin' for me! Thot ould divil hilped me to believe thot hersilf! So whin Oi heard yez call, av coorse Oi worn't goin' to sthop and be arristed. A ghost, is it?

Oi'm thinkin' thot yez'd be crapin' round, too, if yez t'ought thot a rope wor riddy to toighten about the neck av yez!"

* * * * * * *

"Haw! haw! haw!"

The roars did not proceed from Joe Gamp, but from the landlord of the hotel. Now that Barney was found to be real flesh and blood, and not a spirit, the landlord had entered more heartily into the search for the mysterious source of the strange footsteps. He had been willing that the doors opening into the corridors should be closed—for only when the corridor was darkened could the ghostly sounds be heard.

As soon as the "footsteps" came again he threw open the door and chucklingly led the way out through a side room into a shedlike structure that came up against the corridor wall.

"There is your ha'nt!" he roared, pointing down into a pen in the shed. "There is your ha'nt! A gol-derned old sea-turtle! Haw! haw! haw! Ho! ho! ho! He! he! he!"

The turtle was a monster in size.

"But—I don't see!" said Merriwell. "This doesn't explain."

The landlord hopped into the pen and flipped the huge turtle over on its back against the wall. Thereupon it began to kick out with its great flippers, striking them

against the corridor wall and making the sounds which had seemed to be footsteps. Merriwell looked round.

"I see!" he admitted. "The light from the lighted corridor came through that transom."

"Jest so!" said the landlord. "Whenever your light shined in here it scart the turtle, and it quit kickin'. It's always trying to climb out of the pen and falling over on its back; and when it tips over near the wall and strikes with them flippers, it makes that sound. If it ain't near the wall, of course it don't strike nothin' to make the sound. And, of course, soon's it can turn itself back—which it can't sometimes for hours—it quits kickin' out."

"And yez tuk me for thot thing and thot thing for me, and aitch av us knew nothing about it, and it wasn't ayther av us!" chuckled Barney.

"Just so!" said Merriwell. "And right glad I am to understand it, and to know that you are living!"

"And Oi niver wor gladder to see anybody in my loife! The soight av yez makes me well. And Bart, me jewel! Yez are as foine a laddie as iver lived! Give me the touch av yer hand ag'in!"

And so the mystery was solved, and Barney escaped, be it said, heartwhole and body free—while Frank and his friends returned to the city.

THE END.

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